THE WIFE AND THE MISTRESS.

A NOVEL.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.

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THE

WIFE AND THE MISTRESS.

A Novel.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY MARY CHARLTON,

AUTHOR OF THE PIRATE OF NAPLES, ROSELLA, ANDRONICA, &c. &c.

" ——Celebrare domestica facta."

HORACE.

" We find fit subjects for our verse at home."

ROSCOMMON.

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THE WIFE

AND

THE MISTRESS.

CHAP. I.

THE next morning Laura rose sooner than she was accustomed to do, in the expectation of again seeing Lord John before he departed; but as he still travelled in the old style, with his own horses, he had set out by the first dawn of light, that he might accomplish his day's journey without inconvenience to any of the party, quadruped or biped.

She took her breakfast, therefore, alone, and hastened to the Rectory, where no

gambling fiend presided—where disappointed vice never disturbed the serenity of its inhabitants, and where triumphant vice never stalked unveiled, and scoffing at restraint—where that dignified modesty that would not unsought be won, was ingrafted on the mind of the one sex, and morality, inculcated by example more than precept, was extended to both.

She was overtaken in her walk by Mr. Aubrey, who was returning home from the village; but he had scarcely exchanged a sentence with Laura, when he was accosted by the deputy of the old steward, who, bowing respectfully to his fair companion, informed Mr. Aubrey, that he had enquired of the Marchioness if she meant to continue the appointments of her free school, and that her Ladyship had not given any definitive answer; but he rather supposed it was not her intention to drop the institution.

"But in the interim," replied Mr. Aubrey, "how are we to proceed without this definitive answer? As the Marchioness founded

founded this school, from respect to the wishes of her Ladyship, I have endeavoured to support it; but we are too much in arrears, both for clothes and tuition, to struggle much longer unsupported by the fund her Ladyship promised to appropriate for this purpose. I have already advanced more money than I could conveniently spare, that the mistress might not starve, and the children go naked, in the hope that when the Marchioness was herself on the spot, every thing would be adjusted; but I cannot advance much further."

"I am very well assured, Sir," replied the man, "that you have behaved in this business with your usual goodness and liberality; but I really do not know what can be done, unless I apply to my Lord. I dare say the Marquis would have no objection to continue the thing, as it is begun."

"I will entreat the honour of hearing the sentiments of the Marchioness," returned Mr. Aubrey, "and apply for an interview with her Ladyship before the circumstance is mentioned to Lord Bellingham:

ham: perhaps she would disapprove of any communication which she did not authorize."

The man now withdrawing, after a pause of a few moments Mr. Aubrey mentioned the departure of Lord John, and Laura professed her delight and gratitude that he did not leave Adwan ere she arrived there.

"He is a man of excellent principles," said Mr. Aubrey; "and as he never professes a friendship, or even good-will, without some previous deliberation, at which his judgment assists, the partiality he has imbibed for you, my dear Miss Delaunie, will, I am certain, be permanent, and I hope productive of advantage to you."

As he concluded the sentence, they reached the Rectory, where Laura was always sure of beholding two or three little rosy faces at the parlour window, awaiting her coming; and the next moment they appeared at the open door, to which they flew in an emulative contest of who should first attain it.

She

She kissed, and thanked them all; and sighed that she could not display her affection, and receive such proofs of answering fondness from Lord Traherne and the little Emily.

Mrs. Aubrey met her as usual, with an extended hand and an unaffected smile of welcome; and Laura, contrasting this endearing scene with her increasing inquietudes and cheerless hours, in the superb mansion of her father, found her heart swell with keen regret, and the tears started to her eyes.

Mrs. Aubrey was surprised and alarmed; and dismissing her children, enquired with soothing solicitude, if she could in any respect alleviate her distress. Laura thought the tone of her voice resembled that of her departed friend; and the remembrance of the long kindness and maternal fondness of Mrs. Rothemere, and that peaceful and pleasing serenity she had ever experienced with her, redoubled her emotion, and she wept bitterly.

"My dear Miss Delaunie," said Mr. Aubrey, "confide your sorrow to the discretion of my good Mary, who may perhaps be fortunate enough to afford you advice and consolation. I will leave you with her; she is already much interested in your welfare, and will participate with sisterly tenderness in your distress, from whatever source it springs."

Laura looked up, to thank them both; and Mr. Aubrey, entreating her to recall the injunction of Lord John, that she should regard them as friends of a much older date than the limits of their acquaintance, then left the room.

"Without this injunction," said Laura, her accents interrupted by sobs, "I must have loved you, dear Mrs. Aubrey, and sought your esteem. I will not insult your goodness so much as to require forgiveness for giving way to my tears, for they have relieved my heart; yet I scarcely know what could have so strongly urged them just at this moment, for I have not any particular

particular grief to complain of, so much as a conjunction of unpleasant circumstances, that unite to oppress my spirits; and I have resolved to impart them to you, if you will have the indulgence to listen to me."

"If, by attaining a knowledge of these unpleasant circumstances," returned Mrs. Aubrey, "I can, by deliberating with you, my amiable young friend, upon the best and most expeditious method of relieving you from them, in any degree succeed, I shall feel considerable satisfaction."

Laura then disclosed to her the increasing enmity of the Marchioness, the rude contempt of her brother, the insidious conduct of the elder Lady Melville, who she well knew experienced none of the interest and regard she professed; and, lastly, the mortifying commands of the Marquis respecting Mr. Averne, and the denunciation with which he had closed them.

"How strange," exclaimed Mrs. Aubrey, "that Lord Bellingham should be anxious to sacrifice you to such a character!"

"Is Mr. Averne then known to you?" asked Laura.

"In a slight degree," replied her friend; "but I am better acquainted with him by report; and the report that enlarges his fame, does not add to the excellence of his reputation. Lord John laments the influence he possesses in the family of the Marquis, as he is convinced it is far from being advantageous to his honour or fortune."

"Mrs. Hamilton named him to me," said Laura, "before I had seen him, and her opinion did not recommend him. But inform me, dear Madam, what must I do?—how must I conduct myself?"

"Will you allow me to consult Mr. Aubrey, my amiable Laura?"

"I think," she returned, "I would rather first wish to hear how *you* would act

act in my situation; for I am certain that in pursuing your advice, I should do right."

"I thank you for your good opinion," said Mrs. Aubrey, "yet I hope you will likewise condescend to extend it to my husband. I will inform him, if I can obtain your leave, of all your difficulties; and I flatter myself Lord John, who is anxious to promote your happiness, will not disapprove the advice he may give you."

Laura consented to the proposition, and the rest of her visit, when Mrs. Aubrey was rejoined by her family, was spent in a more general conversation. She now found her former composure restored to her; and so unwilling, indeed, did she feel to quit the happy and peaceful fire-side of these worthy people, that their dinner was announced to be ready ere she thought of the hour. She now started up, and with a hasty adieu was retreating, but Mrs. Aubrey detained her.

"Many hours have passed since you took your breakfast," said she; "will you not, my dear Miss Delaunie, do honour to our little meal, by partaking of it?

You must have some refreshment before your very late dinner; allow us then the pleasure of your society yet a little longer, by taking that refreshment here."

Laura could not deny herself the satisfaction of accepting this friendly invitation, and she sat down with the children and their parents, who were not too refined to accommodate their hours of repast to the health and convenience of their family.

At half after three Laura bade them farewell; but they would not suffer her to depart unaccompanied, and the whole party conducted her almost to the mansion. She was much hurt that she could not welcome them to it; and Mrs. Aubrey perceiving her embarrassment, hastened away, from a pretended apprehension of the coming twilight.

They were scarcely out of sight when Mr. Sandby, who was sauntering over a small bridge that divided the park from the more private grounds, accosted her.

"My

"My dear Laura," he exclaimed, "I was marching to the Rectory to escort you home! You are much in request *la haut;* and we began to fancy that the Parson had carried you off to attend the matinal *déjeunés* of old Gruffy in town. I have good news for you," he added: "Melville and his Lady are off; they took wing suddenly, and I suppose they are gone to inform Madalina that I am meditating mischief, and to complain of me to my brother. But what the devil can they do if I am game? Damn me, the old Dowager is the most reasonable of the family, after all!—*à-propos*, she desired me to seek you out, and conduct you to her, for she is impatient, as well as the rest of us, at your bestowing your whole time upon those Aubreys; and, in truth, I think it a strange whim too!"

Laura walked on in silence. She was not very sorry to learn the departure of Lord Melville; but she mused upon the office his mother had thought proper to

assign Mr. Sandby, and was chagrined that he had taken the trouble to execute it.

"What does this mean?" thought she: "can Lady Melville be so wicked as to encourage this man to desert her daughter, merely to render me, in the eyes of her connections and of the world, guilty of the artifices that would be then imputed to me?"

"What charms can you have discovered under that godly roof," resumed Mr. Sandby, "of sufficient power to induce you thus to desert us every day? Whilst you are solacing yourself with the squalls of the Parson's large family of small children, we are all vainly wishing for a strain of divine harmony from your lyre."

"Are you not rather exceeding your commission, Sir?" said Laura, gravely. "Did Lady Melville depute you likewise to censure the disposition of my time?"

"I censure you!" exclaimed he—"no, my fair Laura, you are too handsome to be censured, except by such unhappy little animals

animals as Madalina, who have just beauty enough, and cash enough, and rank enough, to procure a lover *par-ci, par-là,* and of course are subject to right honourable furies when the bird won't cage; but you, my charming Laura, are a different being!—you——damn it, here is Averne! what does he want?"

"Yes, here I am," said the intruder, addressing Laura; "is my appearance at this moment *bien, ou mal à-propos?*"

"Not particularly the one or the other," she replied, with a heightened colour, that mounted to her cheek, upon a supposition that a trait of the recommended complacency was now wholly expected.

"I pass on then," returned Averne, with a careless air; but immediately turning back—"Sandby," he resumed, "the Marquis has been looking at your bay mare, and he has offered a bet of five hundred guineas to one, that his filly, Miss Lucy, beats her hollow over a two-mile course!"

"He has not a horse in his whole stud," cried Sandby, with intemperate heat, "that can

can beat her on any course! Miss Lucy! —Damn it, she'll never outrun a mouse whilst the world holds!"

"Fermager is inclined to take the bet," observed the other, walking forward with Laura and her incensed escort; "that is, if you consent to venture your mare."

"I will take the bet," replied he, eagerly. "Where is the Marquis?"

"In the riding-house," returned Averne; and Laura was instantly deserted by the lover of Lady Madalina.

"Your companion has vanished," said Mr. Averne, in a tone of raillery; an observation to which Laura made no reply, but involuntarily hastened her pace.

"Perhaps you regret his evasion," resumed the gentleman; "if so, a single sentence will recall him with equal promptitude;—speak it then."

"Is it possible you can suppose," said Laura, "that the conversation of Mr. Sandby can interest me in the slightest degree? Lady Melville," she added, "commissioned him to tell me that she desired

desired me to attend her, and he had already executed the task."

"The task was far from being an unpleasing one to Sandby," he replied. "Lady Melville sent him!—upon my soul, she is an inexplicable character!"

They had now reached a door leading into a court of the private entrance, and as Laura raised her hand to open it, he condescendingly motioned to take that trouble upon himself; and whilst he still retained the hand she had advanced, the door was thrown open by the Marchioness, who, wrapped in a pelisse, was advancing from it. when her progress was arrested by the object she sought, though, indeed, she had not entirely expected to behold him so well accompanied.

Scorn and indignation flashed from her eyes as they met the confused aspect of the trembling Laura, who very stronglysuspecting the cause of her enmity, now felt shocked and abashed at her probable surmises; but whatever they might be, Lady Bellingham had yet sufficient fortitude to restrain her

her emotion until a better opportunity should invite her to pour the swelling indignation on the head of the detested culprit; and with a regard of mingled anger and contempt, she indicated that Laura should pass on.

Glad to escape, she willingly obeyed, and flew to her apartment; but could not then indulge her painful reflections, because the wish of Lady Melville, to converse with her a few moments, was repeated to her by Dolly, and she forced herself into her presence with a palpitating heart.

Lady Melville had, however, scarcely found time to utter a few insidious speeches, when the Marchioness hastily entered the apartment. On beholding Laura, every muscle of her countenance became in a moment agitated, and her cheeks crimsoned.

"You do not divine, perhaps, Madam," she exclaimed, turning to her mother, "that the modest Miss Delaunie takes advantage of her excursions to those Aubreys,

Aubreys, to make appointments with the almost unknown guests of her father!"

"Oh Heaven!" ejaculated Laura, with an aspect of horror.

"Compose yourself, Emily," interrupted Lady Melville; "you are deceived, I am convinced. Some circumstance, which Laura can well explain, has misled you into an opinion that injures her. Mr. Sandby ——"

"Mr. Sandby!" repeated the Marchioness, with a mien where no resemblance of the gentle, smiling Lady Bellingham could be traced.—"No, Madam, the taste of the young lady points very differently! I can now well believe the affirmation of my brother," she added, "that I shall one day feel the sting of that viper, whom my mistaken folly rescued from poverty, and snatched from obscurity!"

Laura wept, but thought not of defending herself against charges so gross and injurious.

"Emily! Emily!" interrupted Lady Melville, "you forget yourself, and insult

sult me by this want of proper *retenue*.—I am in your house, but you are in my apartment!"

The force of long habit is all-powerful; and Lady Bellingham thus reminded, endeavoured to assume some composure, which her mother took advantage of, and dismissed the sobbing Laura with a charge to be consoled, and view the sudden gust of anger betrayed by the Marchioness, as the effect of a misapprehension she would endeavour to dispel.

"Oh my dear, lost Mrs. Rothemere!" exclaimed Laura, when she had attained her own dressing room, "kindest, best of friends! to what misery have you left me exposed!—in what a storm of jarring interests and passions is that peace wrecked, which with you I ever experienced!"

"Lauk, Ma'am!" cried Dolly, who at that moment entered the apartment, "you don't fancy the doings at Adwan no great deal, I perceives; and I can't say as I'm over fond of 'em neither! for such wrangling, and jeering, and topping of fine gentlemen's

tlemen's actions, and fine ladies' actions, as is in Mrs. Smith's apartment, I never saw before in my born days! Why that Mrs. Boden, Ma'am, is as bad as any spy upon us, and the ill-tempered'st toad!—Why, Ma'am, Mrs. Cuthbert was only common civil to me, being but strange among 'em; and she was fit to eat me up without pepper or salt! And I was just saying something about you, Ma'am; and so, says I—'My Lady,' says I——'Your Lady!' says she; 'well, I'm sure, I wou'dn't demean myself to serve such a Lady,' says she, as spiteful as could be: "your Lady, Mrs. Maunder, is no better nor a poor little bastard of my Lord's!'—Yes, Ma'am, the impertinent hussy said that!"

"No matter, Dolly," said Laura, with a sigh, and in a dejected tone.

"Says I—'Bastard or not,' says I, 'she's handsomer nor any of them that calls themselves grand gentry in an honest way!'—'Handsome, truly!' says she; 'I suppose you will say next that your old Irish mistress, Mrs. Ballyoch, is handsome!'—'And

'And supposen I did,' says I, 'it's not manners in you to say she an't, only to contradict one; and I wonder, Mrs. Boden,' says I, 'you are not ashamed to talk so of Miss Laura, in my Lord's family!'—But lauk, Ma'am, that an't the worst they say of their betters amongst 'em! But they think as it won't go any further, because if any of 'em was to 'peach, they would be put upon the black list, and ten to one if they ever got another place; but fegs, there's no black list in Dorsetshire, and I had ratherer go back there, than set and hear such things, and say never a word!"

Laura was now entirely unfitted to appear: her eyes were swelled with weeping; and when she sought to conceal it with Dolly's remedy of a cold water application, fresh tears gushed out, and mocked her efforts. She was compelled, however, to endeavour to overcome this weakness, and rally her disordered spirits; but she had ill succeeded in the painful task when she was summoned once more to attend her father in the library.

"What

"What new inquietude!" thought she: "has Mr. Averne already complained of my impertinent indifference? What excuse can I offer for the emotion of grief I have so apparently indulged?—Yet I must go."

The Marquis regarded her swollen eyes with surprise and displeasure.

"What has the girl been weeping for in this outrageous manner?" he exclaimed. "By Heaven, those Aubreys," added he, turning to Lady Harriet, who, with the red-faced Mr. Fermager, were both of the council, "those Aubreys will make a rank Methodist of her!—She has been wailing with them, and gnashing her teeth, I suppose, at this degenerate age!"

"My dear Laura," said Lady Harriet, "what can have impelled you to disfigure yourself thus?—You are not fit to be seen, positively!"

She was much distressed at this reiterated enquiry, to which she could not reply; for she could not refer to the violent displeasure of the Marchioness, without referring to the occasion of that displeasure; and she felt

felt a delicate apprehension of imparting to others a suspicion that might involve the whole family in misery and confusion.

"The imprudence of Lady Bellingham may be discovered by other means," thought Laura, "but not through me I hope."

"Why do you not answer Lady Harriet?" demanded the Marquis, with considerable symptoms of anger in his countenance and manner. "Do these sullen humours often occur? Take care, Laura, that you are not required to visit the Ballyochs once more! By G—d, I would not be doomed to encounter for one week so perverse a temper for half the kingdom!—I sent for you, Madam, to inform you that there is no possible necessity for your wasting any more time at the Rectory. I did not chuse to traverse the whim of Lord John whilst he remained here; but there is not the least occasion to continue so silly a custom as that of flying from society, where you may form your manners, to immure yourself in a rustic hovel.—The man

is

is the most insolent fellow in England, and the woman is little better than an idiot!"

"A cursed, artful prude," exclaimed Mr. Fermager, who was examining a long list of bets and hedgers in his pocket-book, "but not an idiot, I believe, my Lord!"

Laura bit her lips with mortification and anger, that she could not vindicate the amiable character thus aspersed; whilst Lady Harriet now began to suspect the origin of the distress, which she evidently did not wish to disclose: and knowing that the Marquis, to whom Fortune had lately been very adverse, was not in the most placid of humours, she did not chuse that Laura should be urged beyond the limits of her forbearance, and taking her hand with a gentle look of compassion, protested that she should not be tormented any further.

"Whatever weeping provocative poor Laura may have encountered," said she, "whether a sentimental novel, a tragedy, or a revision of *billets doux* from a faithless swain, you may easily perceive that she

she has quite wept enough, and she shall not be reminded again of the grievance!"

The features of the Marquis relaxed at this intimation of Lady Harriet's sentiments; and telling Laura she was a simple girl to disfigure herself so thoughtlessly, he bade her retire, and endeavour to render herself fit to sit at table.

Lady Harriet quitted the library with her; and as Laura really felt grateful for her seasonable interference, she acknowledged the obligation in animated terms.

"As the Marquis says, you are a little simpleton," returned the Lady, with a smiling air; "for if I divine right, this pretty countenance, thus despoiled of half its allurements, will better please the very personage who occasioned the change, than if it had remained in its original state."

Laura, shocked at this innuendo, which betrayed more than a suspicion of what she would have been particularly desirous

to conceal from Lady Harriet, regarded her with a changing aspect; and the lady, not chusing to explain herself further, nodded a farewell, and passed on.

CHAP. II.

WHEN Laura reached her apartment, she found that Dolly had left it; and throwing herself into a seat, remained a considerable time wholly occupied by her reflections, which were most gloomy and cheerless.

"I am now," she exclaimed, "deprived of my only consolation, by the restriction that prevents my visits to that amiable family! How could the Marquis allow himself to speak of them with such cruel injustice?—That disgusting Fermager too! Oh what a set of beings has my destiny cast me amidst! I would to

Heaven the poor little illegitimate and despised offspring of Lord Bellingham had not known the misery of laying her head under a roof where she is thus insulted, hated, and scorned!"

The accusations and malevolence of the Marchioness, the equally injurious sentiments of Lord Melville, which she had betrayed in the heat of her rage, the occasional violence of her father, and the insolent animadversions reported to her by Dolly, all pressed to her mind; but she at length recollected that she had not then leisure to indulge a continuance of the melancholy presages they raised, because she had now scarcely time to arrange her dress ere she would be summoned to the eating-room.

She was surprised that Dolly had not attended to assist her; but her surprise soon gave place to chagrin and resentment, when poor Mrs. Maunder appeared before her with a very perturbed countenance, and abruptly announced that she was discharged.

"Yes,

"Yes, Miss Laura, I am discharged, Ma'am," said she, in a hurried voice, "and I'm to be packed off to-morrow by the van, and all through that Mrs. Boden, who an't to be contradicted, forsooth! Who is she, I wonders, that she's to be upholded, and courted, and made so much on? If it wasn't for leaving you, Ma'am, I am sure I shouldn't be in no ways sorry; for your Lords and your Ladies, and the rest of your great folk, may be as bad as they please; but, fegs, they can't outdo their sarvants, let 'em try ever so!—Such ways, such goings on, Miss Laura!—But, Ma'am, I must make haste and dress you.—Lauk! I was taking out your black——but, Ma'am, you looks too handsome in that they thinks; so I was ordered to tell you, Miss Laura, that you are not to put it on any more! I'm sure poor dear Mrs. Rothemere little thought what a mess you was to get into when she died!"

Laura sighed deeply.

"Is it possible," she exclaimed, "that this poor tribute to her memory should be forbidden me?"

"Yes, Ma'am; Lady Melville called me back to say that the Marchioness did not chuse that you should continer your mourning, so she hoped you would oblige her, truly!"

"Did the Marchioness herself give you your dismission?" asked Laura, endeavouring to check her tears.

"No, Ma'am, that was Lady Melville too, who is always meddling with other folks' business!—'Oh,' says she, mincing and prinking, 'I find, Mrs. Maunder, that you have been so unlucky as to affront Boden, the Marchioness's favourite tendant!' says she.—'My daughter is very fond of her, because she has sarved her many a year: so,' says she, 'you must ax her pardon, good Mrs. Maunder,' says she, all in her simpering way, 'and then I'll try to make up matters between you!'—'No, my Lady,' says I, 'I shan't, indeed,' says I,

'ax

'ax her pardon; nor I wouldn't ax pardon of her betters for what I said; for I said no harm,' says I; 'I called nobody bastard, nor I don't think Mrs. Boden oft for to do it, for Miss Laura can't help it, if she is one!'—Lauk, Ma'am, never mind their malice!—So presently in came the Marchioness, as red as fire. So, she said, ax pardon or not, I shouldn't stay in her household to result her people, and I should go that blessed night!—So, with that, when she was gone—'Well,' says Lady Melville, 'I'm sorry, Mrs. Maunder, I can't comedy matters,' says she; 'but I'll recommend you a good place, if you're at a loss.'—'No,' says I, 'my Lady, my character will recommend me a place any day!'—and, fegs, I believe if I takes a good character with me, it's more than I shall leave behind me, amongst 'em all."

"I am very sorry, Dolly," interrupted her young Lady, who had already made many ineffectual efforts to arrest her torrent of indignant and minute communication, "I am very much con-

cerned that you are thus compelled to quit me, and I am hurt that I cannot retain you; but Lady Bellingham must be obeyed! I will give you, however, a letter to Mrs. Hamilton, who, I am sure, will settle you comfortably, if you chuse to remain in London."

"Thank you, Ma'am," said Dolly; "if you please, I should be glad to take it, for I an't above taking a kindness from Mrs. Hamilton; but I'd walk barefoot down to Dorsetshire before I'd have to say thankee to Lady Melville, or t'other; for, Ma'am, there an't much that's too bad to be said of them, or else their *people* as they takes part with, and their *household*, as they turns me out of neck and heels, as one may say, goes near to belie them."

"Hush, Dolly!" exclaimed her young Lady; "pray restrain yourself. I am very much grieved at the occasion of your discontent: but do not suffer your anger to impel you to utter such things—you will injure yourself and me."

"I should

"I should be sorry to harm you, Ma'am," replied Dolly, "for sartain; but, as for me, I don't vally them of a twopenny-piece—let 'em do their worst! I comes of an honest family, and hard-working; and now I sees the trim of these grand Lords and Ladies, and their *household*, which they han't no need to brag of, why I'll make no bones of working hard too, sooner than I'll go on in the heathenish ways as they practises. Says I to Mrs. Merryne, Mrs. Cruden's woman—'Ma'am,' says I, 'pray does my Lord and Lady go to Church in the Chapel,' says I, 'Mrs. Merryne, or does they go to the village to Church? cause,' says I, 'if we have to go to Adwan Church, let's you and I walk it together:' and with that, Ma'am, she fell a laughing ready to split her sides, and went and imported me, as they call it, in the housekeeper's apartment. And then, as you are alive, Miss Laura, it came out that the Marquis and his Lady had not been in a Church or Chapel, or what not, sin they married—nor then neither, for

these great folks, they say, can marry in any hole or corner; and I take it that's partly the reason they think no harm of unmarrying again, whenever the maggot bites.—Try some rose-water to your eyes, Ma'am; mayhap that would do better.—Why, there was young Lady Melville—they calls her young, cause t'other's old, else she's no chicken—to think of her devocing herself, and leaving all her children to be took care of, or not, as it might happen! Well, Ma'am, if you'll me believe, all the children of the two husbands met together to a ball at some lady's house, and, poor things! nobody told 'em as they were all brothers and sisters! And, what's more, her Ladyship's first husband met her one day in the Park, at Lunnon; and so Harry says, he nodded to her quite good-natured, and said, loud enough for the sarvants as was with the carriage to hear —' I'll be damned——' I only says his words, Ma'am—' I'll be damned if she don't look better than ever!'

" All

"All this is very strange, to be sure," said Laura; "but, my good Dolly, it is better not to repeat any thing you may have heard, whilst you remain here, or in the neighbourhood."

"Not I," returned Dolly; "I shan't mention nothing, not I; and then there's Lady Roller——what's her name? Lauk, Ma'am, she was all but devoced; and your fine Lady Harriet, who is separated from her husband!—That an't a *devoce*, Ma'am, only something like it: why all the sarvants knows that he only gives her four hundred pounds every year, and she spends, they says, nigher four thousand! Why, as they says, how is she to do it, if she don't get helped out by hook or by crook? and gentlemen now-a-days don't give their money for nothing:—they wants more than they gets themselves, what with one vagary and another!"

"Well, Dolly," said her auditor, "I must now go down stairs. I shall see you again at night, and I will then give you the letter for Mrs. Hamilton, and some-

thing for yourself, in acknowledgment of your services."

"Thank you, Ma'am; but the steward is to pay me my wages, Lady Melville said."

"I mean," resumed Laura, "a trifle independent of your wages, which indeed is due to you for being thus suddenly dismissed."

Dolly, making her courtesy, repeated her thanks, and her young Lady then left the apartment.

When the eyes of Laura encountered the figure of the Marchioness, she saw that she endeavoured to conceal the extreme discomposure that still, however, evidently agitated her bosom. It escaped her too, in glances of resentment and disdain, directed towards the object of her vindictive jealousy; and Laura too plainly beheld the storm surcharged with evil, that hovered over her head; but she discerned not any place of security or shelter from its dreaded effects.

Mr. Averne, gay and animated as usual, yet watched, like her, the varying countenance

countenance of Lady Bellingham; and avoiding either to converse with Laura, or to regard her, saw the dark cloud at length take the course of his wishes, and slowly pass over the horizon.

Lady Harriet, who was far from being inattentive to all that passed, now ascertained, beyond a doubt, the subject of Laura's recent sorrow; and she judged from the attention of the suspected Averne to avert the threatened tempest, how much Lady Bellingham had risked to ensure a title to such a sacrifice, and how equivocal had been the success of the elder Lady Melville, when she argued and implored in favour of discretion, prudence, and reputation.

The conversation at table almost wholly turned upon the match between the bay mare and the filly, Miss Lucy. Many bets were offered, and all were taken; and at length the Marquis swore that he would back Miss Lucy to any amount, to be rode by whomever Sandby himself should appoint, under such a weight.

"A match!" cried Sandby, in an ecstacy.—"Done, my Lord! By God, Miss Delaunie shall ride her!—You are fairly in for it!"

"Oh, delightful!" exclaimed Lady Ronald. "Laura must be equipped in style. What shall her colours be?"

"This is not serious, I flatter myself," said Lady Melville, gravely.

"Not serious!" retorted Sandby; "it must be serious! The Marquis is done! —he's in for it!"

"Not serious!" repeated Lord Bellingham; "and why not? She shall be trained directly by Davis; he'll teach her to sit a horse *à merveille* in a few days; and I will engage that Laura manages Miss Lucy as well as himself in a fortnight.—Laura, you can ride?"

"No, indeed, my Lord!" returned she, in a tone of alarm and entreaty.

"Well then, to-morrow morning Davis shall attend you in the riding-house; and long before the weather will permit the decision of the affair, with his instructions,

tions, you will have become an excellent little jockey!"

"I invite myself to witness your first essay," said Lady Harriet.

"I would not miss it for the universe," said Lady Ronald.

"Oh dear," said Mrs. Cruden, "I should like amazingly to be of the party, if Lady Bellingham should happen to rise in time."

"And why should *I* be any *gêne* to you, my dear Madam?" returned the Marchioness.

"Laura, you shall be in the riding-house at twelve," resumed the Marquis; "and Averne will perhaps take the trouble to report progress. I know he is an early riser."

"Is it possible that you are really serious?" said Lady Bellingham, with a heightened colour. "Can you mean that Laura should, in effect, undertake this strange exploit?"

"Well, play or pay was the bargain," said Sandby; "if the Marquis thinks proper to be off, he must——"

"Who rides your mare?" demanded Mr. Fermager.

"He rides his own match," replied Averne; "he cannot do otherwise; no proxies for commoners."

"I always intended it," he returned; "and now that the gentle Hebe——"

"How! how!" exclaimed Lord Ronald, who was generally silent during such controversies; "would you, Sandby, venture your neck upon such a foolish business?"

"I hope," observed Lady Melville, "that the Marquis will retract his intention, and not venture that of Miss Delaunie."

"Impossible, Madam! impossible," replied Lord Bellingham, "that with Davis for her instructor she should be in the smallest danger! He was, you know, riding-usher to the Marchioness some years back, who sat a horse admirably, before she amplified and became nervous."

This unfortunate speech, which had more of thoughtlessness than malice in it,

it, flushed the cheeks of Lady Bellingham a deep crimson: that she should thus provokingly receive commendation for *past* excellence of any kind, or however little regretted, in the presence of an *adorateur*, whose passion was most suspiciously cooling, and in that of a blooming girl, whose pretensions were on the advance, overset her fainting prudence, and she declared, with particular animation, that Laura should not obtain her permission even to qualify herself for the office assigned her.

"I confess I think Lady Bellingham sees this affair in a proper light," said her mother, eagerly preventing the immediate reply of the Marquis; "it would be cruel to require her to give up so much time, which, at the age Laura has now obtained, should be so differently employed."

"Consider, Madam," returned he, "that I have above a thousand pounds depending, and that the credit of Miss Lucy is at stake into the bargain!"

"Mr.

"Mr. Sandby will listen to reason," rejoined the lady: "he will not, I am assured, think a second time of this rash proposal."

Mr. Sandby did not entirely assent to this intimation; but he did not chuse either, for cogent reasons, to hazard the loss of Lady Melville's favour, by wholly refusing to comply with what he secretly thought a very silly and unconscionable demand.

Laura was much pleased that there appeared a prospect of deliverance from the strange task to which she had so slightly been condemned; and could not avoid reflecting upon the different degrees of interest she had created in the bosom of her father, and in that of Mrs. Rothemere, who had always experienced evident inquietude and alarm, when her husband merely proposed that his little favourite should accompany him in any of his riding excursions, lest his inadvertence should occasion her any accident.

The

The subject so little gratifying to some of the party, was now dropped for the moment, and shortly after the ladies retired.

Lady Melville immediately invited the Marchioness to her dressing-room, and they were *tête-à-tête* a considerable time. Laura would then have withdrawn to her own apartment, to write the promised letter to Mrs. Hamilton, but that she was unluckily assailed by the insipid remarks of Mrs. Cruden, who attached herself to her in the absence of both her dear, kind, condescending friends, merely for a little amusement to her *ennui*.

"Poor dear Lady Melville," exclaimed she, placing her chair in such a manner that Laura could not escape her, without previously entreating her to remove, "poor dear Lady Melville certainly looks very ill, Miss Delaunie! I have remarked it for some time past: I believe she frets, and I believe in truth she has reason to be uneasy—but that's nothing! And my sweet lovely Marchioness too—have you not observed, my dear

dear Miss Delaunie, how very much discomposed her spirits have lately been? I have begged and entreated that she would repose her cares in my breast;—a faithful friend, you know, is every thing—but that's nothing! I say to her, my gentle friend—she has some hoarded grief, Miss Delaunie, that I cannot discover—but that's nothing! Lady Melville, you know, is certainly very competent to advise her, and indeed I have lately heard them arguing very earnestly; but I am not in this secret, though I have sometimes hit upon methods to relieve my sweet friend from some of her difficulties; yet this, I am convinced, is nothing of that kind—that is, not of the pecuniary kind—but that's nothing! and indeed I do not know how a generous mind can dispose of its superfluities better than in the service of a friend; and my poor dear late Mr. Cruden left me sole legatee and executrix: he died upon his passage home from Calcutta—but that's nothing! My income, thank Heaven, is very ample: I have attracted the

the attention of several men of fashion, I assure you, Miss Delaunie! Mr. Fermager was very attentive; but my dear Lady Melville advised me not to part with the staff out of my own hands, so I refused all my admirers, and very mercenary certainly they were: Lady Melville proved it beyond a doubt; besides, two hundred thousand pounds, as her Ladyship said, were well worth a Ducal coronet—but that's nothing! But, as I was saying, can you guess at all which it is that agitates and distresses the dear Marchioness in such a manner? I profess that I am quite at a loss, for Lady Melville says, it is only two or three little debts that teaze her—but that's nothing! I have observed that her uneasiness has increased very much these last two days; and I know there has not been any new application since then, or I should have heard of it. Upon my word, the Marquis must want generosity strangely, to suffer her to be thus distressed!—Don't you think so, Miss Delaunie?"

Laura,

Laura, unable immediately to parry this attack, hesitated for some seconds, without finding words to evade the enquiry into her sentiments.

" Oh Lord, my dear," resumed *good* Mrs. Cruden, " I quite forgot myself!—well, forgive my inadvertence—I am quite foolish—but that's nothing! I am so confused with what I saw this morning," she added, lowering her voice, that Lady Ronald and her companion might not distinguish what she said; " for poor dear Lady Melville—don't mention it—was upon her knees to the Marchioness! I happened to be going to the dressing-room, and just as I reached the door, I heard a sobbing, as if somebody was crying most grievously; so I was fearful the amiable Lady Bellingham might be in hysterics, which she often is, when she is much teazed for money, and I popped my eye to the key-hole, to observe if Boden was with her, and behold I saw her mother kneeling to her! Now I cannot, for the life of me, guess what the secret can be!"

Mrs.

Mrs. Cruden then gazed at Laura, either for some information, or for an opinion; but she was as unable to give the one as the other: for the idea of a kneeling parent, vainly supplicating, as she too much feared, a forbearance of that vice that must inevitably be followed by misery, ruin, and dishonour, shocked her soul, and chased the colour from her cheeks; and she forgot for the instant the too probable principles, and the previous conduct of that mother.

Good Mrs. Cruden at length despairing of being able to extract any part of the desired secret from Laura, left her, to prattle to the amiable sister of her lovely Marchioness; and Lady Harriet immediately occupied the seat she had quitted.

"What has that odd creature been saying to you, Laura?' demanded she. "I can believe, however, that she has been imploring you to listen to Sandby, that her *dear friend* may be extricated from the dilemma in which she finds herself; but it will really be much more charitable

charitable to extend your smiles to the favourite of the Marchioness, and snatch her, *bon gré, mal gré*, from the ruinous effects of this terrible *penchant*. Seriously, my dear Miss Delaunie, the imprudence of Lady Bellingham alarms me. I fear that Averne must, for the moment, wave his open pretensions; and you have sense enough, I am sure, to appretiate his forbearance, which indeed the silly persecutions of the Marchioness render necessary; for, with all his apparent levity, he has great generosity and consideration, and would not involve a family——"

"What is this secret that Cruden is talking so much of?" demanded Lady Ronald, advancing to them; "she has been tormenting me these five minutes, with a *galimatias* quite incomprehensible. Do you think my mother looks so ill as she says?"

"Her Ladyship appears rather indisposed," replied Lady Harriet; "but the tender affection of *good* Mrs. Cruden certainly magnifies the evil."

"*Good*

"*Good* Mrs. Cruden," replied the other, "is now gone upon a voyage of discovery, to ascertain the exact degree of malady poor dear Lady Melville is incommoded with!—I should have been alarmed by her folly, only that I am well acquainted with the *tournure* it is apt to take now and then. *A-propos*, Laura, I understand that you are the fortunate being destined by Fate to enchain our *volage*—the favourite of many seasons—the unrivalled Averne! Oh you blush!—you are simple, however, to affect secrecy, when you must be dying to publish your good fortune!"

"Indeed, Madam," said Laura, "I am not——"

"And that protesting physiognomy too!" interrupted Lady Ronald: "*va*, *mon enfant*, many a dignified lady will shortly raise your opinion of your presiding stars, by very vehement regrets!"

As she turned away, Lady Harriet followed her, and they quitted the room together.

"What

"What childish levity and folly!" exclaimed Laura, with indignant emotion. "I am then by every one really expected to receive with delighted humility, the condescensions of this Averne!—and when one of his dignified ladies become outrageous at the atrocity of his vulgar preference, I am to appretiate his forbearance in waving for the moment his *open* pretensions! These dignified ladies certainly believe that I am not entitled to possess any faculty, but that of admiring or obeying, as the caprice or injustice of either may dictate!—Dear and regretted Mrs. Rothemere! when you unfolded my mind, and directed its bias with such tender care, why did you not inform me how little its reasoning and distinguishing faculties would probably avail me? or rather, why did you expand those powers, when they only create in me disgust and contempt where I am expected to revere and love?—Good Heaven! is the Marchioness then so depraved? Can she indeed reject the supplications of a kneeling mother, who implores her to preserve unsullied

unsullied her honour and her fame!—What am I to think?"

As she was rising to withdraw to her apartment, Mr. Sandby entered the room.

"Ha, my little opponent!" exclaimed he, "I came here to consult Lady Melville; but you are an excellent substitute, and I will take your opinion instead of her's."

"I cannot at present attend to you," said Laura; "for I have really a letter to write."

"A letter! well, but listen to me—it is upon a letter I wish you to decide."

"Indeed you must excuse me."

"Indeed I cannot; look, it is from that little toad Madalina, who coaxes me to return to her."

"Lady Madalina does you great honour."

"But what do you advise me to do?"

"As you have chosen to ask my opinion," said Laura, turning back, "I may venture to make it known, without incurring your censure: I should suppose, very little consultation is necessary to

enable you to determine properly; as Lady Madalina condescends to request your return, you had better not prolong your absence beyond her patience or forgiveness."

"Oh, her patience," replied he, "is *à toute épreuve!* and as for her forgiveness, I shall never demand it, if my fair Laura will promise to console me for the outcry her family and mine will raise, if I leave her in the lurch."

"No, Sir," replied Laura indignantly: "if you can act in a manner so little honourable to your character, any mortification you may then receive, I shall believe you amply deserve!"

She then withdrew, and heard him exclaim, as she left the room—"A little dragon!—I'll go directly to Madalina, by G—d!"

"Heaven be praised!" thought Laura: "I shall not then incur the increased animosity of Lord Melville, at least!"

Her letter to Mrs. Hamilton, which she was assured would be faithfully delivered by Dolly, was descriptive of the inquietude and

and discomfort of her situation: she acknowledged the very apparent justice of the intimations she had received from this disinterested friend; and having warmly recommended her discarded attendant to her kindness, she expressed her earnest wishes, as her intercourse at the Rectory was prohibited, that she might shortly meet Mrs. Hamilton in town.

CHAP. III.

WHEN Laura retired for the night, Dolly informed her that she was to depart the next day by a stage that passed through Adwan: because, as the caravan *sot* off by five in the morning, they should not catch her travelling before daylight in such bitter weather.

"So, Ma'am," added Dolly, "I shall have the pleasure for to tend you to-mor-

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row till eleven o'clock; for the cotch don't go through the village till then."

"If that is the case," returned Laura, "I will request you to take a note from me to Mrs. Aubrey, before you leave me. I wish you to deliver it either to Mr. Aubrey, or to herself; and it is for the certainty of having it given immediately into their hands, that I trouble you, Dolly, instead of sending by one of the people of the house."

"Oh lauk, Ma'am, you are right as to that! for, God knows, them there is very little to be trusted, if a body knowed all their pranks! And now I am going, Ma'am, I must beg you to take petickler care how your letters is sealed, as you sends by them gentry: for I cotched 'em reading one of Lady Roller's only the day before yesterday. I see her woman give it to one of the men; and a fine sniggering there was amongst them imperent fellows, who don't mind what they say of their Ladies behind their backs, I can tell 'em that!"

"I thank

"I thank you for your caution, Dolly," replied her young Lady: "I will give you the billet for Mrs. Aubrey then, to-morrow morning."

She then made Mrs. Maunder some pecuniary recompence for the abruptness of her enforced departure; and Dolly expressed great regret that she was forced to go, and not only that, but forced to leave her kind Miss Laura in such hands.

"But I hope, Ma'am, to see you your own mistress one of these days," added she; "and married to a good gentleman such as you desarve—not such as these at Adwan, for all what they say! for I don't think they are any of them good for much—though Mr. Cuthbert says you are to have Mr. Averne, and another says you are to have Mr Sandby, and another that you are to have Mr. Fermager;—and there, Ma'am, they've all laid wagers about it! but, Ma'am, they've laid wagers about other things too, in the family! and I'm sure it's enough to make one's hair stand an end, to hear their discourses. Mr. Cuthbert says——"

"Patience!" thought Laura; "the poor creature will not have any further opportunity of teazing me with Mr. Cuthbert's remarks, and I will not interrupt the loquacity that appears to relieve her mortification."

"Mr. Cuthbert says, Ma'am, that a friend of hisen, who is gentleman to some Lord, married the Lady's woman: and so, the Lord was a Captain or a Kernel, or something, and he went somewhere with the army to fight—and so he toke his gentleman with him, to be sure!—and whilst they was gone, what does me the Lady and her tendant, but they both runs naught—and when the Lord comes home, he falls to sowing for damages, and he gets a power of money; and Mr. Cuthbert says he gave it every farthing to the lady he kept, and a fine windfall it was for her!—Well, Ma'am, and Mr. Cuthbert's friends says he—'I don't see why I mayn't sow for damages too,' says he: 'if my Lord gets his thousands, I may get my hundreds! and I'll be d—mn—d,' says he, 'if the butler don't pay for making

making free with my honour and my conjuggle felicity—for they're as great a loss to me,' says he, 'as my Lord's is to him, or the devil's in't—knowing what I know!' I beg pardon for swearing, Ma'am;—so, Ma'am, he falls to work, and gets *his* damages the very next week. But behold! his Lord went into a terrible great passion with him, for his impertence in employing the very same consul—the man in the court of justice, I mean, Ma'am, who cries out, they tells me, and says how hard it is to be used so!—And as I was saying, this consul, or lawyer, or whatever he might be, what does me he, but he says the same speech he had said before, for the Lord—exact the same, Mr. Cuthbert says, only instead of talking of the conjuggle felicity of great Lords, he talked of the conjuggle felicity of honest men!—So my Lord turned off his gentleman; and the lady, who was in as great a passion with her woman, for being so impertinent to go into court almost at the same time with her, turned her off too! But, Ma'am, the worst is to come—says Mr.

Cuthbert, says he—'I'll bet any body ten pounds that something like this will happen soon, nearer home than some folks thinks for!'—So, Ma'am, half a dozen took his bet all at once: and then they fell to quarrelling about who said 'done!' first. I'm sure the ladies and gentlemen mought have heard their bawling—didn't you hear the noise, Miss Laura?"

"No," she replied, "I did not distinguish any particular noise. And now, my good Dolly, I will wish you a good night?"

"Good night to *you*, Ma'am," returned Dolly: "I wish we was back in Dorsetshire, with all my heart, Miss Laura—and poor Mrs. Rothemere alive and merry!"

Laura, with a deep sigh, joined in the purport of this wish, and her attendant then left her to her repose.

In the morning, she wrote a billet to Mrs. Aubrey, expressing much regret that she was compelled, by an unpleasant circumstance, to abstain from her usual visit at the Rectory: she had intended to entreat

entreat that Mr. Aubrey would call at the park the next day, before the family or their inmates were likely to encounter him; that she might then, in gentle terms, endeavour to qualify the prohibition that detained her from them; and that she might likewise receive the friendly counsel which had been promised her. But she feared, on consideration, that the request would be improper in itself, and after what had passed the lips of the Marquis, degrading to Mr. Aubrey: he had obtained respect as the visitor of Lord John, to whom Lord Bellingham and his Lady paid an unaccountable deference; but as her's, he might meet, perhaps, with insult from a household, which the indignant and unguarded prattle of Dolly had fully taught her to appretiate.

She contented herself, therefore, with an apology, without any expressed wish to see Mr Aubrey, in the hope that an opportunity might naturally occur, in which she could impart what she wished to say relative to the restriction that governed her. Having sealed the billet, Laura

awaited the return of her departing attendant, until the clock had struck eleven; and she then became apprehensive that the Marchioness or Lady Melville would not perhaps suffer her to receive the farewel of poor Dolly, who might consequently have been prevented from again visiting her apartment by Mrs. Boden.

The idea had scarcely been admitted, when Dolly rushed into the room with a countenance bursting with intelligence, and her eyes staring wildly.

"Lauk, Ma'am, what do you think?" exclaimed she: "as I hope to live—— you see, Ma'am, Mr. Averne went away this morning, 'twixt eight and nine, as he said he must—for he made believe as he had got a letter that told him he oft to go to London to-day. So, Ma'am, as you're alive, if the Marchioness an't sot off this morning at daybreak, and nobody knows how she went, but that good-for-nothing hussy, Madam Boden, and she's gone with her."

"Hush, for Heaven's sake!" exclaimed Laura, whilst an involuntary horror seized her; "do not thus express yourself!

self! Lady Bellingham is probably gone to town upon business of importance—— the Marquis is certainly acquainted——"

"Upon business!" repeated Dolly: "it's likely to turn out a fine business for her—a non-natural woman—to go to leave her children—such pretty creatures as they be! No, Ma'am, they say the Marquis don't know of it; and she has not taken any of the carriages, or so much as a servant, or a groom—only that old slut Mrs. Boden, who is gone after Mr. Averne's valet as she was so fond of! And there's old Lady Melville has fainted away two or three times running, and they be gone for the doctor; but now she's come to, and begs they won't tell the Marquis—and she talks of overtaking her, and bringing her back—and there she is all crying out and wringing her hands: but nobody pities her; for they say she desarves it all! And she has ordered her post-chay directly; but they don't think she has strength to get into it, or sit up, when it's ready."

" How dreadful!" exclaimed Laura, her countenance pale as a corse: " but surely you mistake, Dolly—I hope you do —I hope you are in an error!"

" No, Ma'am, bad as they've behaved to me, I wish I was mistaken; but Mr. Tomlinson, who goes about for the old steward, now he's ill, was at market at some place going on towards London, to buy cattle and sheep, and what not, which he does every week for the family's use—so he was in the inn-yard, and who should come up but Mr. Averne in a chay; so while the horses were putting to for him, there came out a waiter to say a lady wanted to speak to him—and he didn't seem fond of going—but there came out another message, and then a scrap of paper wrote upon—so Mr. Tomlinson says, when he saw the paper, he coloured up, and swore a great oath, and in he goes—so then Mr. Tomlinson was curous to know more about it, and waited about, and axed the waiter who the lady was: but he said he didn't know—for both the ladies had their veils on, all over their faces,

faces, and he believed they came from London way——so then he says Mr. Averne came out in a huff like—and who should come after him but the Marchioness—though he did not know her then for her thick veil, which she held all about her face like—and Mr. Averne told her to go back before it was too late, and then Mr. Tomlinson heard her voice, and he thought he must have dropped down—and says she—'No, I'll never go back; but I'll follow you—what's done is done, so don't think,' says she, 'to serve me so!'—And after a tussle, they went away together, and he gallops back like mad, to tell what he'd heard and saw! so they went and told Lady Melville, and she took on till they thought she'd never come to life again!"

Compassion now seized the agitated bosom of Laura.

"What shall I do?" she exclaimed. "It may be thought presumption if I ask to be admitted to her——yet not to go! Is Lady Ronald with her unhappy mother?" she asked.

"She

" She is by this time," returned Dolly. " Lady Melville was for not having any body called; but some of 'em went without leave, and had her waked. Lauk, Ma'am, did you ever hear such a ringing and flurrying about? Gracious! there's the Marquis storming out! Oh Lord! I wouldn't meet him now for all I'm worth in the whole world!"

Laura listened in breathless agitation: and as Dolly had left the dressing-room door half open, she heard her father hastily descending the stairs, and in a loud and hurried tone, desired his valet to follow him to London full speed.

" Bring my pistols to the carriage," he added, " unloaded as they are; I will charge them myself, to save time!"

Laura turned sick at this ill-boding sound, and staggered to a chair: whilst Dolly ran to a window, that overlooked the court-yard of the entrance generally used by the family.

" Oh Ma'am!" exclaimed she, " if there isn't old Lady Melville a kneeling down in the dirt and snow to my Lord! Oh

Oh fathers! my Lord's in such a passion, she won't let him get into his post-chay!"

"For God's sake remove from the window!" exclaimed Laura, in an agony; "do not, I conjure you, Dolly, suffer your curiosity or your terror to give you the appearance of watching what is passing."

"Lauk, Miss, they're too busy to look up at me!—Oh joles!" added she, raising her clenched hands, "he'll kill her—he'll kill her, as sure as twopence!"

Several piercing screams now assailed the ears of Laura, and forgetting the caution she had so recently given, she darted to the window; whilst Dolly exclaimed—"He's pulled his coat out of her hand, and she's flopped down, with her face all upon the stones!"

Laura beheld the Marquis leap into the carriage that waited for him, and it instantly drove off with great velocity. Lady Melville was raised up by the attending servants, and carried into the house apparently lifeless: and Laura now entirely forgetting the probability that her attentions

attentions might be rejected with disdain, flew to offer them to this unfortunate mother: but she had been taken to the apartment of Lady Ronald by her own desire, and thither Laura could not presume to follow her.

Alarmed, perplexed, and irresolute, she returned to her apartment, and remained there more than an hour in entire solitude: for Dolly, who had quitted it when her Lady did, had not returned; and Laura was not sorry to be allowed an interval of silence and reflection, to collect and arrange her scattered ideas. They were now, however, interrupted by the sound of another carriage driving to the entrance: and unable to restrain her wish to learn who was coming, or who departing, hoping too, notwithstanding what she had heard, that it might be the Marchioness returned to her home and her family, she crept to a window, and saw Lady Ronald enter a travelling-carriage, followed by her Lord.

"Good Heaven! can she desert her mother?" thought Laura: "it is not

surely possible! Lord Ronald perhaps insists upon her removal; or she may be going to seek the Marchioness, and induce her to retrace her guilty steps."

At this moment Mrs. Cruden claimed admittance to her.

"Lord bless me, Miss Delaunie," exclaimed she, "have you seen—have you heard——it is too true I find indeed!—Who would have thought such a thing of the Marchioness? She must have been deranged before she could forget herself in this shocking manner—but that s nothing! Lord bless me, I don't know whether to go or stay—or what to do! Poor Lady Melville! Heaven be praised, I have no daughter! Between you and me, Miss Delaunie, the Marchioness has had fifteen thousand pounds of me: and now, I suppose, I shall neither get my money back again, nor any credit for having lent it! Lord bless me, I shall be so teazed about this naughty woman—but that's nothing. And at this minute I do not know what upon earth I am to do! I sent to speak to Lady Melville, but she was too ill to see

see me—but that's nothing! Lady Harriet declares she was leaving Adwan, before the sad discovery, and she must absolutely go to-day; but she thinks I ought to stay till to-morrow, or next day, to see how things turn out—but I profess I am quite bewildered. I would not do any thing unhandsome towards my good friend, Lady Melville; and yet perhaps I shall be expected to go directly, that I may not detain her here. My dear Miss Delaunie, I declare I never met with such an accident before——what shall I do?"

"Indeed I cannot presume to say, Madam," replied Laura.

"Lord bless me, but don't you think I had better endeavour to find out whether Lady Melville wishes me to stay or go?"

"Certainly, I should suppose," said her young adviser, "that the presence of a friend would be a consolation very desirable to her Ladyship, if she really is unable to remove: and that can be soon ascertained."

"So

" So it can; well then, my dear Miss Delaunie, if I remain here to-day, and the poor Countess is too ill, and too much shocked to do the honours of the house, I will take a snug comfortable dinner with you; for I suppose there will scarcely be any formal table, now every thing is in such confusion."

Laura, very much disgusted with the selfish apathy of *good* Mrs. Cruden, was on the point of excusing herself from partaking any snug comforts with her, but that she happened to recollect her own affinity to the Marquis was well known; and she might therefore be expected to render every attention in her power to his guests thus strangely abandoned; she assented then to the proposition, though she could not prevail upon herself to do it very cordially.

" I declare I am quite glad that I shall have somebody to speak to, if I must stay a day or two," resumed Mrs. Cruden; " so now I will go and try to pick up a little more intelligence of the state of affairs."

Laura

Laura was relieved by her absence; but ere she had remained five minutes alone, Lady Harriet Clifton entered her apartment, her countenance strongly marked with vexation. Laura regarded her in silent apprehension, and her visitor, throwing herself on a seat, exclaimed—"It is even as you may have heard, Miss Delaunie! This silly woman has too surely awaited Averne upon the road, and joined him;—one of Lord Bellingham's people beheld them together at some inn. He must have been mad not to have shaken her off! Though I am convinced she was resolved to plunge him into ruin, even at the price of her own perdition. Of this I am well ascertained, that he had not the least suspicion of her design, and that he left Adwan to avoid her importunate fondness. She must be insensate—bewitched! I could not have supposed that she would so shortly have gone such lengths!"

"Perhaps she will return," said Laura, hardly conscious of the import of her words.

"If

"If she should be so inclined," resumed Lady Harriet, "the Marquis cannot again receive her! But I have studied her disposition; and the barrier once passed, she will proceed in this irrevocable folly of braving the world and its opinion, with the same ungoverned licence that marked her career of extravagant dissipation. Lady Melville thought her influence could never fail: but the temper of the Marchioness was soured by the receding admiration and homage of mankind, which she had received until she fancied them her's by charter, I believe —and her mind, harassed by the tormenting effects of her lavish humour, threw off the shackles she had hitherto worn without murmuring. Averne she has long regarded with admiration; but I hoped that his knowledge of the world, and his limited circumstances——I must however curtail my observations.——I sought you, my dear Miss Delaunie, to bid you adieu: affairs of importance to me call me hence, and I must immediately leave Adwan. I wish to assure you

you that I interest myself in your destiny, and that I hope to see you in town."

Laura could scarcely conquer her disapprobation of the character and conduct of Lady Harriet, sufficiently to acknowledge this unexpected profession of favour; but they at length separated with great politeness and a semblance of urbanity, for which the unpractised Laura detested herself, and which nothing less than the dread of a father's hatred could have extorted from her ingenuous temper.

Laura then rang for Mrs. Dolly, who had not, she concluded, thought more of her intended journey; and, according to her expectation, Dolly obeyed the summons.

"Well, Ma'am, here I am, you see," said she: "behold, when I came for to remember about going, which, as old Lady Melville is still here, I supposed I must, I was past my time by about two hours—and who can wonder at that! And now perhaps, with this holly-bellew,

and

and scuttling all different ways, I may be let to stay!"

Laura replied that this must be a future consideration; and then dispatched her to enquire how Lady Melville was, and if she might be allowed to attend her Ladyship. After waiting a considerable time to procure the delivery of the message with which she was commissioned, Dolly returned with an answer, importing that as the Countess was still very much indisposed, and as she was writing letters of the utmost importance, she was compelled to decline the attentions of Miss Delaunie.

"Her woman says, Ma'am," continued Dolly, "that she is going early to-morrow morning! But, Ma'am, Mr. Sandby wants to speak to you—only two words, he says—and he came almost to the dressing-room door; I believe he is waiting."

"I cannot see him!" exclaimed Laura. "How can he at such a moment——unfeeling man! Tell him I certainly

certainly shall not quit my apartment to-day."

Dolly withdrew to execute this command, and her young Lady again yielded to the various reflections that assailed her. Her future destiny claimed a share in her ruminations, and she wondered where this sad change in the family of Lord Bellingham would place her——his children too, the children of the Marchioness!

"Poor little innocents!" exclaimed Laura, weeping at the recollection, "you are abandoned by her who should have watched over you, and secured your early youth from the approaches of evil!"

She would instantly have flown to them, impelled by the strong influence of united pity and affection; but the intimation she had so immediately sent to Mr. Sandby, and the fear of encountering him, withheld her, until she could learn that he had quitted the house.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

MRS. CRUDEN failed not to claim her association at the snug dinner, to which she did honour as usual, without any impediment from the delicacy of her feelings; whilst Laura, sick at heart, and weary of her companion, eagerly expected the moment that would release her from her presence.

"My dear Miss Delaunie, how sad you are!" exclaimed *good* Mrs. Cruden: "upon my word, I shall begin to think that what I hear is true."

"Does it regard me, Madam?" said Laura, sighing.

"Yes, indeed; they tell me that you have a very great *penchant* for this bad man. Don't look so grave, my dear, or you will quite overcome me! Poor dear

Lady Melville has almost killed me with her grief.—She looks like a corpse, and makes herself worse from her excessive impatience to get to town: she has been writing to the naughty woman ever since she could steady her hand enough to hold a pen; but she says, if she could see her, it would be to more effect, and she insists upon setting out to-morrow morning, even if she dies upon the road! Mr. Fermager took leave of me about an hour since—he is going with that silly young man across the country, to Sir William Sandby's. Lady Melville has given him a letter for her daughter Sophia, desiring her, I suppose, to make up the match as soon as possible——and, between you and me, Miss Delaunie, now the Marchioness has disgraced herself, and people will be led to recollect that ugly affair of Lady Ronald, if Madalina does not secure him, she will not get a husband in a hurry!"

"What a pitiable fate!" exclaimed Laura, with involuntary emotion.

"Well,

"Well, really I do not see that!" returned Mrs. Cruden: "if she marries George Sandby, she will do very well, I dare say; and now they have prevailed with him to go back, he will soon come to like her again: but, upon my word, Miss Delaunie, she is not much obliged to you!——Sandby's uncle, who left him the estate, was very fond of Madalina, and always called her George's wife; so it has been a settled thing some time, you see."

This second hint of *good* Mrs. Cruden very much discomposed Laura, who would not, however, deign to enter into any exculpatory discussion with her; but she reflected that such insinuations might very materially injure her character in the estimation of the world.

"Yet can it be supposed," thought she, "that with a *penchant* for one man, I should not discourage the attentions of another? But this woman appears to accuse me in both instances, and thinks not of the infamy attached to such a conduct!"

"Pray, Miss Delaunie," resumed her visitor, after a short pause, "are you to reside, think you, with the Dowager Countess of Melville? I cannot imagine what the Marquis will do with you!"

"Indeed I know not, Madam," replied Laura, in a reserved tone.

"Lord, my dear, you will find it very dull and melancholy here, when we are all gone! I suppose Lady Melville will leave word what is to be done with you; for I dare say the Marquis will still take her opinion upon matters of any importance."

"At such a juncture," returned Laura, "I cannot expect to occupy any share of her Ladyship's attention."

"Perhaps the poor dear Countess will mention you between this and to-morrow morning,' resumed Mrs. Cruden: "but *à-propos*, I must go and drink my coffee with her Farewel, Miss Delaunie! I shall take my leave now, as perhaps I shall not see you again before I go I travel with poor Lady Melville; she requested

quested it of me, and she intends to set out very early."

Laura, who had now discovered the reason of her altered tone, readily returned her adieu, and felt much relieved by her absence: but she was still forlorn and depressed; and when Dolly, who compassionated her dreary situation, returned to her apartment, she could not imagine any method of avoiding her eternal prattle, which wearied and distressed her, but by retiring to her bed.

After a long sleepless night, in which the unhappy transaction of the preceding day, and its apprehended consequences, mixed with renewed regrets for the loss of Mrs. Rothemere, solely occupied her mind, she was just sinking into a doze, when the rattling of carriage wheels in the court-yard made her start from her slumber.

"Ah, if it should be the Marchioness!" she exclaimed, forgetful at the moment that her return would be unavailing. She had risen in haste, and throwing round her a covering, flew to the window but

the sound that had disturbed her was merely occasioned by the travelling chaise of Lady Melville, which was already at the door, though there was scarcely light enough for Laura to discern it.

She now hastily dressed herself, in the expectation of being summoned to receive a parting compliment from Lady Melville; but ere she could sufficiently attire herself to quit her apartment with decency, Mrs. Cruden and her poor dear friend had departed.

From the general tenor of Lady Melville's conduct, she had not expected this entire neglect; and though she could not regret it, she now felt solitary, and abandoned by every one; and bursting into tears, threw herself upon her bed, where she remained until the woman, who generally lighted the fire, made her appearance. Of her Laura enquired if Lord Traherne and his sister were yet up; and the servant replied that she believed not, for they did not generally breakfast till half after nine, or near ten. Laura intending to take her meals with them, if this

this indulgence were permitted her by the gentlewomen of the nursery, went thither at the time mentioned by the woman. She fancied that every thing spoke the desertion of the mother and the mistress of the family; and as she reached the antichamber of the children's eating-room, the voice of Lord Traherne, raised in a mingled tone of agony and rage, assailed her.

Quickening her pace, she passed on, and found his sister and himself unattended but by a young person who performed the menial offices of the nursery apartments. Little Emily was gazing at her brother with a distressed and terrified aspect; and when Lord Traherne beheld Laura, he flew to her, and asked, in a voice almost suffocated with sobs, if his mamma had gone away, and left Emily and him, *never to come back again!*

She took him in her arms, and whilst her tears flowed still faster than his, endeavoured to sooth and console him; then raising her eyes to the unfeeling creature, whose confusion indicated that

she was the cause of this scene, she bade her, in an angry tone, to leave the room.

"I said no harm," said the girl, sullenly; "Lord Traherne is always telling some tale or other, and doing of mischief! I'm sure I never see such a child in my life!" and adding, as she quitted the room—"as like the mother as he can be!"

"How dare you!" exclaimed Laura, in a transport of indignation: then turning to the abandoned children, her tears gushed out anew, and Emily creeping close to her, began crying likewise.

Lord Traherne in a few moments renewed his torturing enquiry, if his mamma was gone, never to come back again.

"Mayn't I have my mamma any more?" repeated little Emily, in a plaintive voice: "Hannah says she is gone away—quite gone away!"

"Hannah is a wicked woman to tell you so," said Laura.

"If I had a gun, I would shoot her!" exclaimed Lord Traherne, vehemently: "but when will my mamma come back, and

and see Emily and me? You shall be my mamma till she comes back!"

"And be Emily's mamma too!" said the little girl.

"Yes, dear child—dearest Emily," returned the still weeping Laura, "I will be your mamma, if I am allowed such happiness——and your's too, my dear William," she added, embracing them both.

At this moment Mrs. Aubrey entered the room, whose countenance, as she advanced, testified how much she sympathized in the distress she witnessed.

"You appear surprised, my amiable young friend," said she, taking the hand of Laura, with the most winning expression of kindness in her accent and manner, "that I thus, unannounced and uninvited, intrude upon you; but I had learned that you alone of the late inhabitants of Adwan still remained here.——I find you however not alone; and I heard as I approached, that young as you are, you offer to take upon you a kind

and tender care, which another has given up!"

Laura kissed the hand that affectionately pressed her's, and struggled for utterance; but the entrance of Lady Emily's nurse prevented for the moment what she sought to express.

This woman had discovered the arrival of Mrs. Aubrey; and fearing that an intimation of negligence might reach the Marquis through Lord John, if it should be observed that the children were entirely confided to the care of Hannah, she thought proper to make an excuse for her absence, by asserting that Mrs. Mason, the governess, had been taken so ill, that she had just that very instant stepped to her room to see her.

Lord Traherne regarded her resentfully, and as though he wished to refute this tale; but he contented himself however, with observing that Emily and he had not had any breakfast, and that he was hungry.

Mrs. Aubrey, in some surprise, regarded

a time-piece over the fire-place; and Mrs. Nurse, whose conscious eye followed her's, declared that it was half an hour too fast.

"Your breakfast and Lady Emily's, my Lord," added she, "is quite ready: but you are to have it in the next room, that you may not disturb Mrs. Mason as yet."

"Will you not come with me, Miss Delaunie?" said the boy, in a voice of entreaty.

"You know, Lord Traherne," interrupted the nurse, with a very lowering brow, "that you must learn your lesson! Mrs. Mason will be very angry if you cannot say it by twelve!"

"I will not remain with you now, then," said Laura: "but I will return at your dinner, and sit with you."

She then embraced both the children, and accompanied Mrs. Aubrey to the breakfast-room, where the prohibition of the Marquis recurred to her; and whilst she secretly deliberated if it should in the present instance restrain her, when

an occurrence so unexpected had wholly dispersed that society, in favour of which her visits had been forbidden, Mrs. Aubrey, who attributed the anxious perplexity her countenance exhibited, to the recent discovery of the infamy of Lady Bellingham, again sought to console her with the gentlest solicitude, by expressions of kindness and interest.

Laura thanked her with fervent gratitude, and at length found courage to mention the immediate subject of her inquietude and doubt, in the most delicate and least offensive terms she could select.

"I must express my sorrow," replied Mrs. Aubrey, with an unaltered countenance, "that your very obliging attentions to myself and my family were not entirely approved by the Marquis: and though I believe his injunction was a mere compliance with the opinion of another, yet, my dear young friend, I will not persuade you to disobey it, even under the present circumstance; but I hope that our mutual friend, Lord John, will have sufficient art to break the unpleasant

pleasant spell that prevents you for the moment from entering the Rectory:—in the interim, as this prohibition, which we will contrive to have taken off in three or four days, does not extend fortunately to an interview, *par hazard*, in the park or the village, I trust I shall encounter you in your *promenades*, to which this fine frosty weather invites you."

"How very good you are!" exclaimed Laura: "I feared to revolt you by this ungracious return to the kindness you have evinced for me."

"No, my dear Miss Delaunie," replied she, "I could not be so unjust as to attach to you any censure for the misapprehension of Lord Bellingham; and as I think he did not act entirely from his own judgment, I therefore hope that he will the sooner revoke his interdiction. Do you walk this morning?—if you do, I will return to my little people, and give them a hint of the pleasure they may probably enjoy, if they pass this way. They are in a terrible bustle that you have

not

not appeared as usual, at the extremity of the beech-walk, obligingly hastening your pace to join them. Frederic feared that you had fallen down upon the slide which his brother and himself have made near the park-gate; and he has been much distressed at the idea, because poor Martha received a slight injury at the same place."

"Sweet boy!" exclaimed Laura, "I will immediately prepare to relieve his apprehensions."

"Take your breakfast first," said Mrs. Aubrey, rising: "my visit has delayed it much too long; and rally your spirits, my young friend. I grieve at the depravity that affixes disgrace to the poor babes above stairs; but the flight of Lady Bellingham will not, I hope, prove very unfortunate for you."

She then withdrew; and Laura, much cheered by her friendly attention, and the increased kindness of her manner, shook off a part of her anxiety and depression. Her solitary meal was soon concluded, and she then began her walk; but

but it was nearly half an hour ere she was joined in the beech-walk by any part of the family from the Rectory: the children then ran hastily towards her, with countenances set in high glee.

"Mamma will be here in a minute," said Frederic: "she could not leave Mr. St. Orme all alone, before papa returned home, or else she would have come before! Mr. St. Orme is just arrived, and we are all so glad to see him! but we wanted to see you too; so we all ran to tell you that mamma will be here almost directly."

"But will you not come home with us?" asked Edward, the second boy.

"Tum and see Mitty Orme," cried their sister; "pretty Mitty Orme!"

"Sophy is his little wife," said Frederic, laughing; "do come, Miss Delaunie, and see her little husband; she calls him her itty husband, and he is taller than papa!"

"Oh but he is very good-natured for all that!" interrupted Edward, eagerly.

"I will

"I will take another opportunity of seeing your friend, Mr. St. Orme," returned Laura; "but though I wish at present to continue my walk, I will not deprive you of the pleasure you take in his society: if you wish to go home, I will await your mamma here; or, if she is otherwise engaged," added she hastily, "pray entreat her in my name not to come out again to-day."

"Oh we shall see Mr. St. Orme all day long," said Frederic, "for I hope he will stay a week; he always did stay a week when he came before."

It was settled at length that Laura should retain the elder boy, whilst Edward and his sister returned home; but they were all very much disconcerted that their new friend and playfellow declined accompanying them to the Rectory.

Frederic and his fair companion walked a considerable time, in expectation of being joined by Mrs. Aubrey; and Laura had just desired him to leave her, and entreat of his mother not to quit her guest, when she appeared.

"Frederic

"Frederic has made my apology, I hope," said Mrs. Aubrey, "for having thus retarded our promised meeting: I would have immediately attended my appointment after having welcomed my young cousin to the Rectory, but that he was anxious to pour into my ear a history of his grievances, in which indeed I felt sufficiently interested to listen with patience and attention. He is now, however, with my good man, whose mediation he wishes to obtain between his sister and his father, Sir William St. Orme, who is not satisfied with having given his children a very insolent dairy-maid for a mother-in-law, but has driven an amiable daughter from his house; and Cecil, her brother, half distracted at this cruel event, has remonstrated rather too warmly, and is now in equal disgrace. I am very much concerned at his distress, and the occasion of it; for he is really a worthy young man, and I believe feels much more for his sister than for himself: Mr. Aubrey will send him back immediately, to conduct her hither; for the poor girl has

has been treated with a severity she has not been accustomed to, by a female relation, to whom she applied for shelter; and she is now in lodgings in town, unprotected but by Cecil, who is only a few years older than herself. Excuse me, however, my dear young friend, that I thus torment you with a history in which you can take but little interest."

"Pardon me," interrupted Laura, earnestly; "any subject upon which you experience so much concern, must greatly interest me! I will now thank you for bestowing any part of your attention on me, when it was so forcibly claimed elsewhere, and then leave you, dear Madam, at liberty to assist Mr. Aubrey in the kind offices of counsellor and consoler."

"I hope soon," returned Mrs. Aubrey, "to have the satisfaction of again seeing you at my own house: *en attendant*, I will venture to make a second appointment with you for to morrow morning, which no other circumstance I trust will compel me to break;—till then

then adieu, my amiable Miss Delaunie! I will not apologize for quitting you now, because I wish to expedite by Cecil, who will retrace some part of his journey to-day, our notice to Lord John, of the cruel edict that detains you from us."

Laura thanked her, desired her respectful remembrances to Mr. Aubrey, and they parted.

On her return to Adwan, which now she thought appeared gloomy and deserted, her reflections were diverted from her own immediate situation, by contemplating that of Miss St. Orme, driven from the protecting roof of a parent, and causing, however innocently, the disgrace of an affectionate brother. His instant application to the Aubreys demonstrated his sense of their benevolence; and the intentions of these good people, of receiving and sheltering his sister, proved that it was a just one.

"How considerate, how amiable are this worthy couple!" thought Laura: "instead of resenting the ungrateful opinion of the Marquis, and ceasing to bestow

bestow upon me a kindness so ill requited, they seek only to remove the interdiction, which to others would appear so just a motive for withdrawing the favour and friendship they had extended to me."

To the extreme mortification of Laura, the next day was too inclement to allow her any hope of seeing Mrs. Aubrey; but her *good man*, as she justly called him, walked through a very thick snow, to inform her that he had dispatched a letter to his old friend, advising him of the situation in which she was thus suddenly left, without a companion, or even a casual associate, since she was forbidden to continue the intercourse so pleasing to Mrs. Aubrey, which Lord John had been so earnest to promote.

"However I may lament the late event," he continued, "from the respect I entertain for my patron, yet I cannot condole with you upon it, my dear Miss Delaunie, because I have sincerely regretted, since I have become acquainted with your temper and disposition, that Lady Bellingham should have had the guidance

guidance of your conduct, and the power of introducing you to her intimates, and the people she calls her friends: and though I participate in the anxiety Mrs. Aubrey experiences for your future destination, yet it must be, in my opinion, certainly more eligible than when Lady Melville and her daughter possessed any influence over it. I believe," he added, "you have heard of the flying visit of our young relation: it is by him I have dispatched our representation to Lord John, who is, I know, in town, where I suppose the Marquis likewise to be. I hope therefore to receive an answer in a day or two: in the interim, I must preach patience to Mrs. Aubrey, who is vexed at the interruption of a gratification which so much flattered her."

Laura experienced the warmest gratitude for the reiterated attentions she thus daily received from people to whom she had so lately been known; whilst her father appeared to display so little affection for her. She forgot not in this interview with Mr. Aubrey the little discussion she

she had heard respecting the female free-school established by Lady Bellingham; and as she concluded her flight could not have amended the state of affairs, she summoned courage to entreat that Mr. Aubrey would employ the note she had received from her father, and which she presented to him, in any way he thought proper, until the business could be represented to the Marquis: but he instantly declined receiving it; and having hinted his approbation of a thoughtfulness so much the reverse of the general conduct she had lately witnessed, he left her.

CHAP. V.

FOR three succeeding days, alternate rain and snow prevented any personal communication between Mrs. Aubrey and herself: but this amiable woman, that

Laura

Laura might not feel herself totally insulated, wrote her a friendly billet every morning, and commissioned her husband to deliver it.

In this interval no letter arrived from the Marquis or Lord John; and when she recollected the tempest of rage in which her father had departed, and those directions to his valet concerning his pistols, which she had unhappily overheard, she trembled with horror at the surmises that assailed her.

Her only sources of amusement in her solitude were the library, her music, and her intercourse with the children, who were allowed to seek her occasionally; but the attendants of the nursery did not by any means chuse that she should, by visiting it daily, have an opportunity of observing their shameful neglect; and their insolence soon compelled her to abridge her intrusions, as Mrs. Mason complained that Lord Traherne would not learn his lessons either when she was expected, or when she had left him; and Lady Emily's nurse declared that the child

child would neither eat nor sleep, because Miss Delaunie would put her in mind of her mamma, by crying and taking on, and making such a to-do!

Laura might, however, have disregarded these intimations, had she not observed that her perseverance was avenged upon the little innocents she so much loved; and she therefore endeavoured to content herself with the visits they were graciously suffered to make to her after her dinner, which she took at an early hour, the longer to enjoy their society.

On the fourth morning the accustomed note from Mrs. Aubrey was sent by a servant, and contained the intelligence that she was hastening to London, to attend Miss St. Orme, who was so much indisposed as to be unable immediately to comply with her invitation: but Mrs. Aubrey added, that her absence would be as short as possible, from many considerations.

This unexpected journey of her friend sunk the spirits of Laura, and her mortification at the circumstance increased, when,

when on the following day she observed the atmosphere clear and frosty, and was invited to renew her walks by a cheering sun.

She met the children of the Rectory and their father in the park, and the whole party expressed much pleasure at the *rencontre*. After numberless greetings from little Sophy and her brothers, Laura enquired when she might hope for the return of Mrs. Aubrey; and had the satisfaction of hearing, that as the malady of the young lady was not represented to be very serious, she had flattered herself that the cares and attentions of a friend would in a few days restore her sufficiently to enable her to take the journey.

"In my representations to Sir William," added Mr. Aubrey, "I have, however, made use of this illness, which, though distressing in itself, will I hope have a good effect."

Laura now enquired if he had learned how the indiscretion of Lady Bellingham

had terminated, and if there were a probability of the affair being made up.

Mr. Aubrey shook his head.

"I have not received any intelligence," returned he, "relative to this unhappy business since the flight of the Marchioness; and I cannot therefore affirm what the intrigues of Lady Melville and the interference of the families may have effected. But it does not appear to me that the affair can be accommodated: the step was a decisive one, my dear Miss Delaunie, and I should think it impossible to attempt to conceal the dishonour which so many can testify."

Mr. Aubrey then changed the subject; but ere Laura returned to her solitary home, she informed him of the dismission of Dolly by the Marchioness and her mother, and enquired if in his opinion it would be wrong to detain her.

The favourable answer of her adviser she immediately communicated to Mrs. Maunder, who received the good news with great glee, as she thought it would have

have been very hard if the impertinence of Mrs. Boden had operated so long after she and *her lady* had taken themselves off.

A week Laura awaited impatiently the return of Mrs. Aubrey; and each day she had walked towards the Rectory, in the hope of hearing that she had cheered her family by rejoining them. In this interval, however, a letter arrived from Mrs. Hamilton, who thanked her for the information of her situation at Adwan; and slightly adverting to the event that had so immediately followed, concluded by assuring Laura of her continued affection and esteem.

In her neglected situation, this assurance was doubly welcome; and it enabled her to await, with less inquietude, the intelligence which she believed must soon reach her, of the manner in which she was to be disposed of in future.

She had now become acquainted with several of the humble inhabitants of the village, and had endeavoured to alleviate by her liberalities the loss and disappointment they generally experienced from the

sudden departure of the Marquis and his inmates; as their residence, and that of a numerous and idle retinue, had procured employment for many of them, and the fragments of the servants' tables had been to all a welcome relief.

In one of her walks to the village, attended by Frederic and his brother, her heart beat quick at the sight of a post-chaise which was approaching from what she knew to be the London road; and on the exclamations of her young companions, who affirmed that it must be their mamma, she walked forward to meet it.

It was indeed Mrs. Aubrey, who let down the glass the moment she discovered the party, and the chaise stopped by her order. She embraced her children alternately; and presenting a billet to Laura, whom she affectionately recognised—

"I received this from Lord John Traherne," said she: "I believe it is from Lord Bellingham. When you have read it, my dear Miss Delaunie, you will perhaps suffer my boys to escort you to the Rectory, whither I must hasten with my invalid,

invalid, whom I shall then have the pleasure of presenting to you."

Laura comprehended from this hint what Mrs. Aubrey meant to infer, and returned her acknowledgments in an animated tone. As she descended from the step of the carriage, which had been let down for the children, she regarded, for the first time, the companion of her friend, and perceived that she was a very pretty young woman, apparently about eighteen, who looked ill and fatigued. Laura gave a momentary commiseration to the distress that had occasioned her indisposition, and then hastily opened her letter, whilst the chaise drove on.

"My dear Laura," wrote the Marquis, "as Lord John makes a point of your seeing the Aubreys, and as you are now rather *à l'abandon* at Adwan, I have no objection that you should avail yourself of their inclination to have you with them now-and-then. I desire,

however, that you will not suppose your residence at Adwan is to be permanent, and form any violent attachment to these people, as I intend, notwithstanding what has taken place, to have you properly introduced and brought out. When I have arranged things a little, you shall be recalled from your solitude, where you may remain a few weeks, Lady Harriet thinks, without much injury to your future hopes of establishment, concerning which I am very anxious.

"I desire you will not fail to attend to the harp, and exercise your voice, that it may gain strength, which it appears to want. I am pleased with your progress; but I would still have you continue to cultivate your musical talents assiduously.

"Your's truly,

"BELLINGHAM."

"Here's Mr. St. Orme!—here's our cousin Cecil!" exclaimed Edward, as she concluded this tender epistle; and Frederic,

deric, pointing to a young man on horseback, who was following the traces of the chaise, repeated the exclamation.

"Mamma is come home—mamma is just gone by!" said Edward, in a joyful tone, and running up to Mr. St. Orme, who checked his horse to shake hands with the boys.

"You will stay with us now?' asked Frederic: "you will not go away again directly?"

"Not immediately," replied he: "but you are detaining this lady, who I believe was walking with you."

"Yes, Miss Delaunie is going home with us," cried both the children at the same moment: "but," added Edward, "if you will just give me a little tiny ride, I'll come back to her in a minute!"

"Indeed," said Laura, smiling, "I do not require such an effort of your politeness."

"You may go, if you please," said his brother, with an air of superiority, "but I shall stay with Miss Delaunie!"

"You are a very fine fellow," returned Mr. St. Orme, "and a man of judgment; we will, however, indulge Edward, because he is only a little boy, you know."

He then raised him to the saddle, and bowing to Laura, rode on.

"Now don't you like Mr. St. Orme?" asked Frederic: "is he not very good-natured?"

"He appears to be so, indeed," replied his companion.

"But do you like him?" resumed her interrogator.

"Oh certainly!" she replied.

"I thought you would like him," said Frederic; "for every body likes him—— Martha likes him too—she says he is a very handsome young gentleman. Do you think he is a very handsome young gentleman?"

"I suppose I must think so," returned she, smiling.

"What, very handsome indeed?"

"What does Martha think?" asked Laura,

Laura, rather embarrassed by this very close enquiry.

"Oh she thinks so, for she said so!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed she did!" cried Frederic, earnestly; "and so does Susan, and so does John!"

"And what does your mamma say?"

"Oh, mamma says he is very good; and when I grow up, and Edward too, she hopes we shall be good; then every body will like us, as they do our cousin."

"Do you love Miss St. Orme?" demanded Laura.

"I never saw her," replied the boy: "she lived a great way off, with her papa and Mrs. Freeman; but Mrs. Freeman is dead, and she is coming to live with us a little while."

They had now reached the outward gate of the Rectory, and the conversation of course dropped. Mr. Aubrey opened the door to Laura, and taking her hand, welcomed her with great kindness to his dwelling: he informed her that his wife was at that moment with their invalid

guest, who had been compelled to retire to her apartment; but that Mrs. Aubrey would very shortly descend and greet her, and had enjoined him meantime to exert his utmost gallantry to amuse her.

"And notwithstanding my rusticity," added the good man, "and that I am a few years older than this gentleman, whom I announce to you as my friend St. Orme, yet I have no intention of transferring the office to him, however willing he may be to receive it from me."

St. Orme bowed; but he remained silent, and in a few moments appeared to be in a deep reverie, which Mr. Aubrey designedly, however, interrupted more than once; whilst Laura, who perfectly recollected the little history she had heard of his situation, experienced a powerful sentiment of compassion for him, and of contempt for his father, who could injure or neglect a son, distinguished by the partiality and friendship of such beings as the Aubreys.

The amiable mistress of the mansion at length appeared, who repeated the welcome

welcome Laura had already received from her husband, in still more flattering terms; and then turning to Mr. St. Orme—

"I have the satisfaction of informing you," said she, "that our dear Caroline is much recovered: she requires rest after the fatigue of the journey; but I am sure she will now do very well."

The countenance of the brother was much enlivened by this pleasing intelligence, and the cheerful accent in which it was delivered.

"I need not tell you," resumed Mrs. Aubrey, "that this is my young friend, Miss Delaunie, since you said, I believe, that my boys had introduced you."

"Not absolutely," returned he, smiling; "my name was rather announced to the neighbouring echoes, than to their fair companion: but their admired Miss Delaunie I certainly could not mistake."

Laura was not suffered to leave her friends until the evening; when she was conducted home by Mr. Aubrey,

attended by his servant, to whose care singly he would not entrust her.

She had not yet seen Miss St. Orme, who had not quitted her apartment the whole day, where her brother, with affectionate solicitude, had repeatedly visited her: but on the next morning, when Laura breakfasted by appointment at the Rectory, Mrs. Aubrey presented to her her young inmate, who was evidently much recovered, and received the salutation of Laura with great complacency and sweetness. In the course of the day she declared more than once that she had not been so happy for a long, long time; and the good Aubreys, to whom both brother and sister evinced the most animated gratitude, had succeeded likewise in enlivening the spirits of their friend Cecil.

The children, of whom he appeared very fond, quite idolized him; but they had been hitherto principally consigned to Martha since the arrival of Miss St. Orme, as their mother feared they might overpower

overpower her weakened nerves. After their usual walk, however, they were now, on a promise of being wonderfully quiet, admitted to the general sitting-room; and the better to shew their attention to the injunctions they had received, they would speak only in whispers.

Frederic, after having held a conversation of some length with his favourite St. Orme, who had taken the little girl on his knee, turned to Laura, and in the same repressed voice he had hitherto used, he informed her with great composure that he had been telling his cousin Cecil that she liked him very much, and she thought him very handsome indeed!

She felt confounded at this happy intelligence, and her cheeks crimsoned to a painful excess, whilst Frederic still in a whisper proceeded—

"He says you are very beautiful; and he dares say he shall like you by-and-by: but he says he never likes people till he knows they are very good; and I told him you are very good, so he will

like you by-and-by!——I like you and him too!"

Laura imagined the reply of St. Orme to the inquisitive Frederic was a tacit reproach to herself for her own supposed avowal; but she felt that it would be impossible to explain to him, even by a third person, the manner in which this fancied approbation had been extorted, and though she was mortified at the circumstance, she thought it would be better not to appear to make it of sufficient consequence to receive such a revisal as it must undergo, if she mentioned it to Mrs. Aubrey.

At about eight in the evening Miss St. Orme retired, and Laura at the same time bade Mrs. Aubrey adieu.

"We see you to-morrow?" said the amiable woman, detaining her hand as she was leaving the house.

"I will come immediately after breakfast," returned Laura, "and pass a long morning with you, if you will allow me."

"And

"And why not give me the pleasure of your company the whole of the day?" returned Mrs. Aubrey.

Laura hesitated.

"Those poor little creatures at Adwan," said she, in a low voice, "would justly think I had quite deserted them. I am only permitted to see them after my dinner; and for two days past they have been disappointed of the visit they have such pleasure in making me."

Mrs. Aubrey pressed her hand.

"You have an affectionate and considerate heart," said she; "but I hope we shall be able to arrange this better: for the present, my dear young friend, I will not detain you; we will think of some method to-morrow to enable you to pass two or three hours with those poor little babes, and yet allow us your society until this hour at least. I hope you will kindly assist me to render this place less dreary than my poor Caroline might otherwise find it."

To this Laura readily assented; and escorted as on the preceding evening,

she then walked home. When Mr. Aubrey was turning back, after having wished her a good night, the servant who opened the door to Laura, informed him that Lord John Traherne had arrived early in the afternoon.

At this intelligence Mr. Aubrey entered the house, and Laura accompanied him to their old and mutual friend, who, after a laconic greeting, said that he had not proceeded to the Rectory, because he found himself fatigued, and because he understood that it contained visitors. Then turning to Laura—

"How are you, Miss Delaunie?" said he: "so I understand that you have been interdicted lately from following part of the advice I gave you or perhaps I should say that I threw away upon you!"

"I hope," returned Laura, who still felt rather appalled by the rigid air of her ancient Mentor, "I hope that your Lordship will not find it entirely thrown away."

"You

"You will be quite alone here very shortly," resumed he; "for I find that the children and their attendants are to be removed immediately. Are you much dissatisfied with your solitude?"

"I have not found it such, my Lord," replied Laura: "Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey have most kindly rendered it far from a solitude to me!"

"Hem! you now wish to retire, I presume!"

Laura, extremely disconcerted at this abrupt hint, curtsied, and withdrew. She imagined that Lord John wished to confer with Mr. Aubrey upon the present situation of Lord Bellingham's family, and was chagrined that she had not prevented him the trouble of dismissing her. But in fact, Lord John now found himself unusually and powerfully interested in the welfare of Laura; and as he never yielded to a partiality weakly founded, he chose to interrogate Mr. Aubrey very strictly upon the observations he had been enabled to form of her character, before he allowed any further

symptom

symptom to escape him, of a prepossession which he feared and expected to find either misplaced, or at least far too sanguine.

Lord John was a widower, and the only offspring of his marriage had been one son, a young man of the most amiable character, who had given every promise of becoming an ornament to his name and family; and this son he had followed some years before to an early grave, to which Mr. Traherne had been conducted by a severe disappointment, attended by circumstances of peculiar aggravation, conjoined with a constitution by no means robust, and a heart that trembled at the miseries of others, whilst it silently smothered its own.

This disappointment was connected with the history of the ill-fated mother of Laura:—he had felt the influence of her many virtues, heightened as they were by superior personal graces; but he knew the determined temper of his father, and he too well knew likewise the cruel persecution to which the discovery of

of his fatal predilection would subject the fair and unfortunate object that inspired it, who was wholly dependant on the bounty of his aunt, Lady Betty Traherne, a woman of unconquerable pride and uncommon austerity.

The mother of Laura was the daughter of a physician, more skilful than eminent in his profession, who had originally practised in London; but the declining health of a wife he loved and esteemed, compelled him to quit the metropolis, when his merit was dawning on the public eye; and he then settled in a distant county, near a populous town, and as it happened, in a situation equally contiguous to an estate of Lady Betty, whose life Dr. Delaunie twice preserved by an unusual exertion of attention and skill. His own days were shortened by the anguish of failing in every attempt to prolong the existence of her who was most dear to him; and Lady Betty thought herself bound either by gratitude or decorum, to offer an asylum to his orphan daughter, a lovely girl of sixteen,

teen, who had been cherished and nurtured with all the fond attentions of parental love.

Mr. Traherne beheld her sufferings in her subsequent situation; and that he might not increase them, he vigilantly guarded his secret from the knowledge of her tormentor: but the more impetuous admiration of his cousin Bellingham, by exciting his jealousy, at length betrayed his passion, and Lord John withdrew him without any explanation of his motive, from the vicinity of her who inspired it.

Lady Betty did not learn the intelligence, at which her pride and indignation were equally excited, with the same prudent calm: her luckless *protégée*, dowerless and destitute, but of that *favour* she had now reason to deplore, was compelled to endure her tyranny, her vindictive reproaches, and still more hateful charges of seductive arts and machinations, to which her ingenuous mind, supported by the pride of youth, and all its candid attributes, and glowing with

with the consciousness of innocence, was wholly abhorrent.

Lord Bellingham witnessed the anguish of her heart, smarting with unredressed and accumulating injuries: in her presence he was warned to beware of her allurements, and he marked the indignant resentment that tinged her cheek, and sparkled through the falling tear: in secret he found means to sooth her wounded spirit, by protestations of unlimitted esteem, and entire belief of the artless and exculpatory tale she told. But Lady Betty soon became suspicious of those assiduous and repeated visits her young companion vainly conjured him to forbear, who found at length her situation too intolerable to be supported either with health or reason unshaken; and with despair and the most destitute poverty for her associates, she fled.

Lord Bellingham traced her wandering steps, and she fell into a gulph of misery till then unknown—the misery of guilt!

Lord John now felt that his son was secure; but his satisfaction was of short duration:

duration: for Mr. Traherne hearing suddenly the intelligence of Lord Bellingham's cruel success, was precipitated by the shock into a fever, which first seized his brain, and finally settled on his nerves. He was however slowly recovering, when the marriage of the Marquis, and his consequent desertion of the mother of Laura, again agitated his mind. Every agony of remorse, shame, and slighted affection which she could experience, his fancy depicted, and his heart endured; and her well-remembered image, now convulsed with anguish, and pressing her abandoned babe to a bosom once so spotless, eternally assailed him.

Lord John trembled once more for his life—he trembled for his reason tottering to its basis; but he knew not that he might yet tremble lest the delicacy, the pride, or the rectitude of Mrs. Stanmore might be insufficient to guard his son from a marriage which would now dishonour him—a marriage Mr. Traherne earnestly solicited.

Upon

Upon her repeated rejection of his suit, he suffered himself to be conducted to another climate, where he breathed his last sigh; and Lord John found amongst his papers several letters from Mrs Stanmore, which informed him of the wishes of the deceased to become her husband, by the generous arguments she employed to soften her refusal of his reiterated importunity.

Agitated by deep and bitter sorrow for the untimely fate of his only child, he now felt this sorrow heightened by remorse for the worldly policy which had shortened his days; whilst his eye wandered over the proofs he had discovered of the worth of her, for whom his regretted son had wasted his last years in anguish and in painful suffering.

Lord John compared the character and conduct of this son, for ever lost to him, with those of the Marquis and of the greater part of the young men he had an opportunity of observing; and he beheld them with disgust. On his return to England he had heard that the object of

Mr.

Mr. Traherne's unhappy passion had formed an honourable union with Mr. Rothemere, whose connections and friends were become her firm supporters, from the tried merits of her character; and that she had been impelled to form this engagement, to reclaim the privilege of being allowed the society of her daughter.

He heard at length that she was no more, and he gave a sigh to her memory——he gave many to the imprudence, the extravagance, the thoughtless follies of the woman who had succeeded her in the affection of the Marquis, whose pecuniary necessities he had been more than once called upon to relieve by loans, which he was induced to grant, in the hope of supporting the credit of that name which he venerated himself, and wished to be respected by the world. Hence arose the deference which Lord John obtained from Lord and Lady Bellingham; and hence arose that patient endurance of his eccentricities, and of the pointed reproofs that escaped his lips, when he contrasted the despicable

cable follies he witnessed, with the virtues he too well remembered.

When he first beheld Laura, he was struck with her beauty, and the unfeigned diffidence and sweetness which he had so often contemplated, *en travestie*, in the countenance and in the manners of other young women, who make it a point of decorum to appear all that angels are, and men adore. His favourable sentiments rapidly increased, and he would have remained longer at Adwan, had not the extreme disapprobation he experienced for the occupations of its inmates, and his disgust at the characters of the Marchioness and her family, driven him thence. He had now returned, resolved to ascertain from the judgment of Mr. Aubrey, and his own further observation, if Laura, the disowned gem of the house of Traherne, were worthy the designs he had formed in her favour—designs that were strengthened by the recollected entreaties of his dying son, that he would watch over the child of

Mrs. Stanmore, at that time abandoned to the caprices of Lady Bellingham, whom Mr. Traherne detested.

CHAP. VI.

ON the following morning, when Laura again met Lord John, he accosted her with peculiar complacency, which she justly imputed to the kind partiality of her new friends; but he appeared at the same time unusually grave and thoughtful; and when by his command the children were conducted to him, Laura beheld a tear start to his eye.

Lord Traherne, who had learned that he was leaving her, expressed much regret at his removal.—"But if we go to Bellingham House," continued he, "we shall see our mamma again, shall we not?"

"Never!"

" Never!" exclaimed his uncle, in a vehement voice.

The boy starting at the unexpected violence of the sound, looked at Laura, in the hope that she would contradict the sentence; but inexpressibly distressed, she turned from him, and wept.

" What have I done!" ejaculated Lord John, in a low voice: then taking the child in his arms, he pressed his quivering lips to his forehead, and hastily left the room.

Little Emily, who had hitherto been restrained from crying, by the fear of her cross uncle, now burst into tears; whilst Lord Traherne, with an indignant and swelling mien, exclaimed—

" I will see my mamma! Why won't they let me see my mamma? But I *will* see her——when I go to Bellingham-House, they shall not hinder me!"

Laura knew not what to say that might sooth him, and console his sister: at this moment however, fortunately for her feelings, a servant entered, to announce that the carriage and attendants of Lord

Traherne and of Lady Emily were ready, and to enquire, by the instruction of Mrs. Mason, if Lord John or Miss Delaunie had any commands for her. As Laura had been apprized of this sudden removal, she had addressed a few lines to her father, which she now withdrew to transmit to the *gouvernante*.

When she returned to the same apartment, Lord John had re-entered it, and was uttering his farewell to the children: Laura embraced them both with fresh tears, and they were conducted away. She was then retiring, but Lord John recalling her—

"My friend Aubrey," said he, "will be here the whole of this day, at my request. I wish to have a long and uninterrupted conversation with him. You are, it seems, a very welcome guest at the Rectory, Laura, and I wish you to be there more particularly to-day: go, child, dry your eyes, and walk thither."

She found the amiable Mrs. Aubrey more than usually animated, and Caroline St.

St. Orme, who was sitting with her, appeared cheerful.

"Did you meet my good man in your way hither?" asked her friend.

Laura replied that she had not.

"He passes the day by appointment with Lord John," resumed Mrs. Aubrey, "who tells him——But you look sad, my dear Miss Delaunie," added she, taking the hand of Laura, whom she placed by her side: "and I cannot suffer you to be so, when I have heard, not many hours back, of your conquest over the stubborn prejudices of an old man, who has been affirming, I believe for fifty years, that the world will never again produce a woman with a genuine, unadulterated mind! Caroline entreats that I will hide her if our worthy misanthrope should bend his steps this way: but I mean on the contrary to present her to his Lordship, as another proof of his late error."

Miss St. Orme, however, very earnestly declined this intended honour, in favour of her original plan of evasion; and consented to relinquish every probability of

sharing in the triumph of Laura, which she well merited to enjoy without any participation, she added.

The point was not wholly adjusted when the little Aubreys and their favourite Cecil entered the room: the children, as usual, ran to Laura, who received them with the same kindness that first won their regard; but when she contrasted the joyous mien they displayed with the disconsolate faces of Lord Traherne and his sister, as they were led from her by attendants who had evinced themselves careless and unfeeling—abandoned by one parent, and merely receiving at intervals the transient endearments of the other, she burst into tears.

Mrs. Aubrey was for a moment unable to divine the subject of her emotion; but when she recollected that the deserted children of Adwan had left it, it immediately occurred to her; and she desired Frederic, in a whisper, to conduct his sister and Edward to the nursery.

Caroline St. Orme felt her own eyes suffused when she heard the convulsive sobs

sobs of Laura, and her brother appeared equally shocked and concerned; whilst Mrs. Aubrey, finding that her distress increased by successless efforts to repress it, at length led her into another room, where she soon recovered sufficiently to communicate to this good woman the melancholy reflection which had thus overpowered her. At her request, Mrs. Aubrey then returned to Miss St. Orme and her brother, who were equally desirous of learning the cause of her emotion, and that it had subsided. Cecil, who was well informed by report of the character and conduct of the Marchioness, extremely compassionated her little deserted offspring, whose mortification and anguish Laura, from the energy of her own feelings, and the impetuous affection of her own heart, had unconsciously heightened, in her recital to Mrs. Aubrey.

When she re-appeared, she was received with increased consideration by the St Ormes; and Caroline soon found an opportunity of insinuating a wish that she might obtain the esteem and friend-

ship of Miss Delaunie—an intimation Laura replied to with grateful avidity.

Mr. Aubrey returned not until the evening was far spent; and as the atmosphere was then damp and foggy, Lord John had sent his own carriage to convey Laura home; an attention that flattered her the more sensibly, as she had not lately been accustomed to experience any from the family at Adwan.

Lord John still continued, however, cautious and reserved: he was not visible to her that evening, and in the morning he surveyed her, as she sat at his breakfast table, rather with the air of an inquisitor, than a partial friend.

Laura felt confused and anxious; she was in terror lest she had inadvertently offended or disgusted him; and having with difficulty sustained, for some time after the conclusion of the meal, the steady regard of his penetrating eyes, which were fixed upon her from under his thoughtful brow, she at length arose, and without venturing to break the profound

profound silence he had maintained, withdrew.

In her retreat, she met Mr. Aubrey, to whom she related her fears, and the occasion of them.

"You misinterpret the sentiments of your venerable friend," returned he; "they are entirely favourable to you: but as he has not of late found himself impelled to regard any one with sudden esteem or partiality, he is fearful of becoming——I must apply his own term—*an old fool*, however impossible such a thing can be. And this combat of inclination and prudence renders him in your presence more than usually reserved. But, my dear Miss Delaunie," added he, "you are impatiently expected at the Rectory, where your assistance is required to console our young guests under an affliction, which I hope will not be a lasting one. Caroline has received a letter from her ill judging father, announcing his continued indignation against his son:—of herself he writes with more lenity, and I trust his dis-

pleasure will not long be retained, to the prejudice of his parental tenderness."

Mr. Aubrey then passed on, and Laura with a hurried step flew towards his hospitable mansion. In the beech-walk, however, her speed was arrested by the sight of Cecil St. Orme, who was pacing it in a hasty and disordered manner, his arms folded, and his eyes fixed upon the earth.

She pictured to herself his mortification and anguish to find the gay prospects of his youth entirely blighted, and feel himself compelled to quit the society, and abandon the connections his situation in life and the former bounty of his father had enabled him to form—a bounty which Mrs. Aubrey had informed her had bordered on profusion. At another moment Laura would have passed on, without doing violence to her natural timidity, by making an effort to accost him; but at this peculiar juncture she feared his depressed spirit would ill construe any accidental circumstance that might be imputed to slighting contempt or indifference;

ference; and she crossed the wet grass to join him.

But St. Orme perceived her not; and for a few seconds she thought of returning and pursuing her way: yet, if he then beheld her, he would most certainly suppose that she was quitting the path to avoid him.

"That would be still worse than if I had coldly passed him!" thought Laura; and she followed him a few steps.

St. Orme stopped in a musing posture; and Laura, whose courage failed her, stopped likewise. He raised his hand to his forehead, and sighed: an exclamation of regret escaped his lips, and fearing she might hear more than he would have chosen any one to listen to, with some hesitation she prevailed upon herself to join him. He started, and the colour heightened on his cheek when Laura stood before him; nor did she exhibit less confusion.

"Have you already visited the Rectory, Miss Delaunie?" demanded he, observing, with some surprise, the direction

in which she appeared to have been walking.

"I am going thither," Laura replied; "but I beheld you, and I turned——I was walking in the upper path."

"Caroline tells me," returned he, with a half smile, "that I have lately lost the faculty of perception; and I must now really believe her, since Miss Delaunie could approach me, and I knew it not!"

"I will enquire if Miss St. Orme rested well last night," said Laura, "and then allow you to meditate without further interruption."

He again sighed, and looked very grave.

"Yes, she rested well," returned he; "but this morning her peace and repose have been cruelly disturbed! The *meditation* you observed, had its source in the same cause."

"I hope soon to perceive by her cheerfulness and your's," returned Laura, "that the cause is removed."

"You are very amiable and benevolent," replied he, in an earnest tone, "and

"and Caroline is happy in obtaining such a friend!"

Laura felt highly flattered by this simple sentence of commendation; but by some combination of idea it brought to her recollection the conversation of Frederic, which at the moment had so much discomposed her, and which now recurred with the same effect.

St. Orme accompanied her to the Rectory; and during the remainder of the walk they were almost wholly silent.

When her brother appeared, poor Caroline vainly endeavoured to conceal the depression which would, she well knew, operate to increase his inquietude, and which in his absence she had relaxed in her efforts to subdue. Mrs. Aubrey was sitting with her; but she had dismissed the children, that their observations and enquiries might not embarrass her distressed guests, to whom she proffered consolation, more by the amiable solicitude of her attention, than by exhortations not to experience that anxiety and regret it was so natural to feel. Her example

example was followed by Laura; and the good sense and urbanity of Cecil and his sister induced them to repay the kindness of both, by allowing them to believe it in some degree successful.

Laura learned in the course of the day that when Lord John quitted Adwan, Mr. Aubrey proposed to make a journey into Herefordshire, where Sir William St. Orme then was, to endeavour to ameliorate the decree against his son; but that Cecil himself had little expectation of his success in this friendly undertaking.

"If his fears should be verified," exclaimed Caroline, when her brother had accidentally left the room, "what will become of us? I dread the effects of his resentment and indignation: he cannot live upon his commission; and he once talked of selling it, and going to the East Indies!"

Mrs. Aubrey entreated her to have a stronger reliance upon the zealous good offices and the further representations of her husband in his behalf.

"They

"They must be successful," said Laura, earnestly, "I am assured they must; and your happiness will be quickly re-established."

Miss St. Orme appeared consoled and encouraged by these friendly persuasions: when Laura left the Rectory, she was serene and composed; and the change in her aspect had a proportionable effect on that of her brother.

Lord John was again invisible to Laura until the breakfast hour the next morning, and she then learned that in another hour he meant to set off for London. Before his departure, he enjoined her to continue assiduously to cultivate the friendship of her worthy neighbours. "I wished you," added he, "to remove entirely to the Rectory, which would be a more proper and convenient residence to you than this is: but they have, I find, already admitted other guests, wholly entitled to their protection, and an additional inmate I know they cannot receive. The distance however is not great; and as you are not, fortunately

fortunately for yourself, a fine lady, you will not scruple, I suppose, continuing to walk there, and return in the same way:—indeed it generally happens, and it certainly is very proper, that a great benefit should be rather difficult in the attainment, that it may not be too lightly estimated. I have thought that perhaps you may be in pain concerning any additional expence which your presence may create in this little frugal, but generous family; if so, banish that fear—I will take sufficient care to settle the point to my own satisfaction.

"I am sorry the Marquis will not suffer you to remain here as long as I could wish. Had such a woman as Mrs. Aubrey directed the youthful mind of the Marchioness of Bellingham, the family she has dishonoured would not at this moment be compelled to blush at the depravity that has so severely wounded it."

The deep and energetic tone in which this last sentence was uttered, proved to Laura how keenly this depravity was felt by

by Lord John; and as his countenance at that moment displayed an austerity appalling even to her who was conscious of not having provoked it, the colour forsook her cheeks, and she trembled.

He gazed at her for a few moments in silence: at length—"You will shortly," resumed he, "so I understand, be removed to town: yet even there the good counsels of Mrs. Aubrey may follow you. And I, Laura Delaunie—I will be your friend, your protector, and your father! I speak not rashly—and I am resolved! In your childhood you were recommended to my affection by——the first of human beings! Alas, poor youth!—— but you have been in good hands!——go, child—leave me!"

Laura, who beheld a tear steal into the furrows of an aspect generally so rigid and so stern, felt all her fears dissolve into respectful compassion; and taking his hand with an inexpressible emotion, she pressed it to her trembling lips.

Even this indirect mention of his son had softened the soul of Lord John, and he

he received the silent testimony of her gratitude with complacency.

"Farewell, Laura Delaunie," resumed he, "farewell! When you are recalled to London, I will again see you;——here you are safe—there you will be exposed to the machinations of the rich profligate and the needy adventurer: but I will watch over your welfare——farewell, child!—leave me!"

"Ah, my Lord!" said Laura, still detaining his hand, "you are superior to my poor acknowledgments: but I must offer them, humble though they are! I feel all the condescension of your Lordship; but I will not trespass further on your patience, than to assure you that I can estimate it properly!"

"Well, well," returned he, "it is enough—farewell!"

Laura returned the adieu with zealous respect, and withdrew. In a few moments she beheld his carriage drive through the park; and as she watched the receding wheels, she reflected upon his

his parting expressions and the emotions that had agitated him.

"I was recommended to his affection," said Laura, musing, "by the first of human beings! and this was not Mrs. Rothemere, for he apostrophized this being as a man—a young man!—It was his son! and how could my destiny have interested him?"

This was a question not all her reflection or reasoning could solve; and after a long reverie, she at length recollected the amiable group at the Rectory, and casting off the pensive mien she wore, hastened to join it with her accustomed satisfaction, and the light step of hope and pleasing expectation.

The servant who admitted her, informed her that his Lady had been sent to by a poor woman in the village, but that she was expected to return every moment; and Miss St. Orme had walked with her.

"Is Mr. Aubrey at home?" asked Laura.

The man replied that he was not; and on entering the general sitting-room, she beheld

beheld only Mr. St. Orme and the little girl, who instantly enquired why she had not come sooner.

"We have anxiously expected you for some time," subjoined her companion; "and my little wife has openly expressed her impatience and chagrin at your tardiness, notwithstanding the eloquence I have exerted to cheat the moments of expectation. I begin to think myself very ill treated; for I recollect the time when I was without a rival in the favour of Sophia."

Laura was pleased to observe the cheerful accent in which this sentence was uttered; and as her own spirits were elevated by the declared protection of Lord John, she replied with some vivacity. They were now joined by Miss St. Orme, who said that Mrs. Aubrey had been compelled to prolong her charitable visit, and had desired her to offer her excuses to their friend.

"I am quite delighted," added she, "that this formidable Lord John is at length gone! I began to fear that as you

you were so uncommon a favourite, he might take it into his head to run away with you to town."

"Indeed," replied Laura, "much as I respect his Lordship, I should have complied with great reluctance to such a proof of his favour; but whilst Mrs. Aubrey is at Adwan, I should not, with the inclination of Lord John, be removed from it."

"I am very glad to hear that," replied Miss St. Orme: "but if he often takes these fancies of flying here without notice, I shall be afraid of venturing into the park, lest I should unadvisedly encounter him one of these days."

"He is not quite so tremendous," said Laura, smiling, "as your imagination represents him, I believe."

"You, Miss Delaunie," observed St. Orme, "will perhaps think him more so, when he presents to you a very grave and solemn gentleman, some learned Judge, or Reverend Bishop perhaps, as a happy pretender to your fair hand, and your requested heart."

His

His sister laughed, and Laura attempted to smile: but as she did not think such a thing quite impossible, a sudden apprehension seized her, that Mr. Aubrey might have dropped an intimation that had given occasion for this idea.

"Or if his Lordship thinks," continued St. Orme, with an air of pleasantry, "that the gay fancies of youthful beauty should be better consulted, he may propose to you some gallant hero who served with him in forty-five—some veteran, majestic Field-Marshal!"

"That would be a degree better," observed Caroline. "What does my amiable friend say to this high advancement?"

Laura, with some effort, replied with equal gaiety, and the entrance of Mrs. Aubrey soon after relieved her from an embarrassment and inquietude she feared to betray, and could not entirely define the source of.

This gleam of unexpected vivacity from Cecil St. Orme was soon overclouded however, by his returning absence of mind, and a thoughtfulness that increased

increased as the moment of Mr. Aubrey's departure approached; who, notwithstanding his efforts to hasten it, could not immediately arrange his affairs for an absence of two or three weeks, by procuring a substitute for his professional duties.

CHAP. VII.

AT length, however, Mr. Aubrey announced that he was at liberty to begin his journey, and that he meant not to defer it longer than the following morning.

"My fate will then be shortly decided," returned St. Orme, in a composed accent; but the words were followed by a sigh, and his mien denoted anxiety: yet he shortly after rallied his spirits, and endeavoured to join, with an unembarrassed

unembarrassed air, in the general conversation.

Caroline appeared to entertain better hopes; and when Mr. Aubrey bade her adieu, as he departed, her pleasing expectations were not allayed: whilst the heart of her brother sunk with unacknowledged fears, and that of Laura experienced a corresponding emotion of deep inquietude, as the chaise which contained the worthy mediator, conveyed him from the door, when she reflected that upon the success of his mission depended most probably the welfare and happiness of Cecil St. Orme and his sister.

"If it should fail," thought she, as her eyes earnestly and unconsciously followed the track of the carriage wheels, "if that good man should find this selfish father deaf to his representations, his entreaties, and remonstrances, what will be their doom! Caroline might exist contented in an humbler situation than her birth would entitle her to; but her brother, who has tasted so unboundedly

of

of affluence and independence, what will become of him!"

She had remained several minutes motionless, and pursuing with anxiety this reflection, when Miss St. Orme took her hand, and leading her into the house—

"Would you not suppose," said she, addressing Mrs. Aubrey and her brother, "that it was the destiny of Laura our kind friend was going to determine, and that we had exchanged situations, from the expression of her countenance and her pensive mien?"

St. Orme regarded her in silence, and his sister continued.

"When Mr. Aubrey returns with pleasing intelligence, I am assured I shall scarcely rejoice more than Miss Delaunie! You must not be sad, Cecil," added she, observing his melancholy aspect; "our dear Mrs. Aubrey will assist in dispersing these gloomy forebodings, and so I am certain will my kind Laura—for they are all charity and goodness! And here are your young playfellows return-

ing from their walk, who will readily join in the combination."

St. Orme thanked her for her generous exertions in his favour; but he found himself unable to second them by any effort of his own, and shortly withdrew, to indulge the dark presages that appeared to have seized his mind.

Caroline then burst into tears.

"Oh Mrs. Aubrey!" she exclaimed, "if my father should indeed cut off his prospects, and abandon him to difficulties, to which he has been hitherto so little accustomed, what will be the event!"

"Depend upon my prediction," returned she, "that Sir William will not wholly desert his son: he may indeed considerably diminish the appointment your brother has until now received; but this will not in fact be doing him any injury, since the only fear Mr. Aubrey has ever allowed himself to entertain, lest he should sully the amiable character he has ever supported, arose from the too unlimitted dissipation into which his profession and his associates may have drawn

him, and from the designing train of speculators and parasites which a very young man of large income, and still more extensive expectations, will ever attract about him. The cloud which now obscures his fortune, may disperse these, and he will in future learn to select even youthful friends and companions, with a judgment and discrimination he might not perhaps otherwise have so soon attained, and which may very materially contribute to his future happiness."

Caroline found that consolation from the arguments and assurances of Mrs. Aubrey they were meant to bestow; and Laura experienced an almost equal relief from them: but she thought she had discovered a latent meaning in the speech of the amiable monitress, that in a small degree reflected upon the conduct of St. Orme, in the prosperous career of his early fortune; but whatever his errors might have been, they had not, she discerned, been of sufficient magnitude to deprive him of the esteem of his friends,

and she concluded that it would be therefore wrong to withdraw her's.

On the following morning Laura had promised to join the little party at the Rectory earlier than usual; and Dolly having received an injunction to attend her an hour sooner than she had been accustomed to await her levee, fulfilled the order with unusual alacrity; and with a simpering mien, amidst many other enquiries which the good humour of Laura would not allow her to refuse a reply to, asked when Mr. Aubrey was expected back.

"Indeed I do not know, Dolly," replied her young Lady, with sudden gravity.

"Ma'am, I hope you an't offended," said Mrs. Maunder: "but to be sure we are all on tiptoe to know the up-shot of Mr. Aubrey's going to the old gentleman, Sir William!"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Laura, turning to her attendant in extreme surprise at the familiar manner in which

which the object of the journey was mentioned by her.

"La, Ma'am! I hope you won't be affronted at my curiosity-like," said Dolly; "but to be sure we do want sadly to know when it's to be."

Laura still gazed at her in great perplexity; and Mrs. Maunder, mistaking her astonishment for anger, thus continued—

"Well, Miss Laura, I'm sure, Ma'am, I never mintioned it before, thof I knowed it all along!—And you needs must own a fortnight's a long time to hold one's tongue—especially when they are all fit to tear one to pieces to find it out: for, says they to me—' Mrs. Maunder, sure you know all! When your young Lady comes home of a night, don't you go for to think to make us all believe that she don't chat a bit with you, as she's nobody else to speak to!' Says I—' You're mistaken, and niver was more out; for she says niver a word to me,' says I; 'and I can't help thinking it somewhat hard,' says I, 'seeing as I have lived with her

ever sin she be a little creetur, no higher than that, that she can't trust me with so much as a word of her secrets, and every body else can talk of 'em, all round the country, afore I'm to be trusted a bit!"

"What is it you can mean?" cried Laura: "pray explain yourself!"

"Weil, Ma'am, then if I must speak out, I must!—All the folks says you are to be married to the young gentleman at Mr. Aubrey's, the Parson's; and they says too——"

"Is it possible!" interrupted Laura, in equal surprise and confusion: "and did you really believe this story, Dolly? What strange ideas people will conceive!"

"Lauk, Ma'am! it's natural enough, for that matter, that folks should suppose it! I sees nothing strange that a young gentleman and a young lady should fall to courting, for my part, in such a lone place as this, where there an't nothing else to amuse 'em!"

"It is entirely a mistake," interrupted Laura, earnestly: "I entreat, Dolly, that you will not credit such folly, but contradict

contradict it whenever you have an opportunity."

"Well, if I an't all amort," exclaimed Dolly, "to think of the things folks will sit and make out of their own heads!——and here if I didn't believe every word on't—only I thought it very odd, Ma'am, as you should not just give me a little hyphen of the matter? cause I didn't think it, you see, Ma'am, quite the thing, as the very coal-carrier drudge, and the helpers in the stables, are to be talking over your secrets, afore I gets a twinkling of 'em!—I thought that there very hard, I must needs own. But, lauk, Ma'am, they go furder than that; for they makes no bones of saying that that old Lord and the Parson settled the match in the library, when they was laying their heads together, so snug as they thought!—but they're always upon the listen in this house I think—and that comes of your *devoce* doings, and your *cream-gone*, and all that sort of work! If you'll believe me, Miss Laura, the sarvants that came down here said, they had been

expecting a cream-gone trial these six months; and the old butler swore he could niver get the table laid, or a thing cleaned, because the men were all upon the listen, thinking to come in witnesses in Court, 'cause they says it makes their fortune—for they generally gets presents a both sides, to speak or hold their tongues, as it may suit. And so you know, Ma'am, if one sarvant sees another upon the watch, he thinks he may as well too, and so it runs through the house: and when they gets used to it, you know, if they sees two people a talking, they goes naturally, and lays their ear to the keyhole! And so, Ma'am, as I was saying, old Lord John and Mr. Aubrey——but, lauk, they says that Mr. Aubrey is downright gone to ax the old gentleman—the father, if he's agreeable!"

"For Heaven's sake, Dolly, do not thus torment me!"

"Well, Ma'am, and if it be so, where's the harm on't? I'm sure, Miss Laura,

Laura, you needn't be so close, for I should not mintion it to a living soul!"

"I repeat that it is a mistake!" returned Laura, in an accent of vexation: "however this report may have originated, it is entirely false!—it is no such thing!—it was never thought of!"

"Well, Ma'am, I only say what other folks have said before me. I'm sure I thought no harm in just asking if it was true or no, and you needn't be angry with me, Miss Laura!"

"I am not angry; but I am very much chagrined and hurt that such a foolish story should be circulated; and I entreat, Dolly, that you will inform every one who may have spoken to you upon the subject, that they are in an error—that they are mistaken!"

Mrs. Maunder, very much disappointed at the result of the conference, promised however very implicit obedience to this injunction; and Laura, musing upon the pretended discovery of the household at Adwan, and deprecating the mortification of finding that their

impertinent report had reached the ears of St. Orme or his sister, heeded not that the time was already past at which she had proposed to be at the Rectory.

As she was concluding her breakfast, even at a later hour than usual, Dolly rushed precipitately into the room, and in an elevated voice exclaimed—

"Miss Laura—Ma'am—who do you think is come?"

Laura started, and her cheeks became suffused with crimson.

"Why, who but Captain Rothemere, Ma'am! He was coming up the park-road, looking out of one chaise window, and then out of another, in his way, all in a hurry—and I knew him at ever such a distance off: so all of a sudden he sees my Lord's horses exercising there over the brow of the hill; so he jumps out of the chay, and runs up to them, and falls to looking at them, and talking to the grooms and boys, and there he is now; but John is come forward, Ma'am, and has asked if you are here."

Laura

Laura experienced a secret vexation at this intelligence, which she could not immediately controul or suppress. Severely condemning herself, however, for this sentiment, which she was apprehensive might be remotely allied to disrespect towards the memory of her best friend, and equally reproaching herself with ingratitude to Mr. Rothemere, she endeavoured to conquer her repugnance to meet him, and receive him with apparent respect and satisfaction. But this was a task he unconsciously rendered still more painful and difficult, by the childish absurdity and boyish inconsiderateness of his deportment.

More than half an hour had elapsed, from the time he had been announced to Laura by Mrs. Maunder, ere he could prevail upon himself to suffer the horses and their attendants to pursue the exercise he had interrupted. To each of the animals he in turn took a violent fancy, and eagerly enquired of the head groom, if the Marquis meant to part with any of them.

Mr. Groom-major, more surprised and offended at this importunity, than gratified by the extreme and indiscriminate admiration he expressed for the whole stud, at length galloped off, followed by a sneering train of stable-boys and helpers, leaving the poor gentleman to gaze after them with anxious sighs and wishes, excited by the splendid destiny of the most noble Marquis of Bellingham.

In the interim Laura dispatched Mrs. Maunder to the Rectory, to explain to its amiable mistress the circumstance that detained her from her engagement; and then, with a heart not very light, and a half stifled emotion of chagrin, she rose to meet her former playfellow and companion, whose wandering eye had caught her figure as she passed a window; and recognising her with a nod, he advanced to the house, and she then compelled herself to seek him at the hall-door. Some object, however, in the exterior of the building had caught his eye, and Laura was in the necessity either of waiting the conclusion

conclusion of his reverie, or of breaking it by walking up to him.

She chose the latter expedient, and he then abandoned his meditation.

"Laura, my dear girl, I am charmed to see you!" exclaimed he, saluting her with the same freedom he had used when she was yet a child. "Heaven and earth! you are in this little time embellished beyond all imagination! What cursed folly, to immure you in this place! Upon my soul, the finest creature I ever saw!"

Laura, shocked and confounded at these unceremonious ejaculations, the last of which however was intended for a running-horse of the Marquis, and not, as she imagined, for herself, yet endeavoured to express some satisfaction at the proof of remembrance with which he so unexpectedly honoured her, and made an effort to render him more rational by enquiring if he had lately seen Mrs. Hamilton.

To this demand, he replied by an exclamation of—

"Who

"Who have we here? I understood that the whole party had dispersed immediately on the elopement of the Marchioness, and had left you a solitary tenant of this enormous mass of building!"

"I entreat," interrupted she, shocked at this careless and unreserved mention of a circumstance she could not advert to, without deep anxiety and inquietude—— "you will be overheard by the servants—this place is surely improper——"

He smiled contemptuously at the extreme delicacy of her scruples, and seizing her hand, turned her half round, and directed her attention to the figure of Caroline, who was walking from them, accompanied by her brother. At this moment she turned her head, and perceiving that Laura was regarding her, she would have retraced her steps, but that Cecil drew her towards the Rectory, apparently employing some argument to dissuade her.

"Good Heaven!" thought Laura, the idea suddenly darting to her brain, "they must have witnessed the familiar address and

and deportment of Mr. Rothemere; and what then will St. Orme imagine of him and of me!—He leads his sister away!"

"Who is that elegant girl?" demanded her tormentor, in an impetuous accent.

"It is Miss St. Orme," replied Laura, almost unconsciously endeavouring to follow her.

"A daughter of Sir William?" resumed Captain Rothemere, detaining her—"the Herefordshire family?"

"Yes, I believe so," replied she, attempting to disengage her hand. "Miss St. Orme perhaps supposes——I wish to inform her——"

"And who is that young man?" added he, entirely disregarding the inquietude Laura evidently suffered.

"Her brother. Will you not allow me——"

"St. Orme! so it is, faith! I thought I recognised his features——but where the devil are they wheeling off to? When I first saw them, they were walking this way! I hope *I* have not frightened the fair lady off the field——upon my soul, report

report says true, she is handsome! a devilish handsome fortune too, I understand—fifty thousand at least! Is it not?"

"It is impossible I should even guess," replied Laura, in an accent of ill-concealed vexation. "I must go—or I must send——"

"Pray what attracts them to this neighbourhood?" pursued the incorrigible Rothemere: "faith, I was rather mistaken, when I supposed you to be entirely cut off from society here by the d—mn—d folly of the Marchioness! I heard that the place was a wilderness, wholly uninhabited, and from mere compassion resolved to relieve your melancholy seclusion by a visit!—I was talking of your woeful destiny to the officers of our mess, and by Heaven they all volunteered to a man, in offering themselves as a partner in an excursion to Scotland."

Laura, who had now entered the house, moved towards the breakfast-room she had lately quitted; and scarcely knowing what she said, entreated that she might not

not be rallied upon a subject that necessarily created so much sorrow and inquietude in a family whose welfare must ever interest her.

"Rally you!" repeated he; "I declare to God, I am entirely serious! But inform me where the St. Ormes are at present——is the old Baronet in this vicinity? Are they stationary, or on the wing? Upon my soul, she appears a fine woman!—My dear Laura, give me some coffee or chocolate; I am famished!"

Laura rang for refreshment, and the servant who attended, informed her that Mrs. Maunder wished to speak to her.

Dolly had performed her commission, and was returned with a billet to her young Lady from Mrs. Aubrey, who would not, she said, forego the expected satisfaction of her society; and begged that Captain Rothemere would have the goodness to accompany her to the Rectory, if he had proposed to himself to remain the day at Adwan.

This was a point Laura very much wished to ascertain:—her secret wishes had

had not his longer continuance for their object; for independent of the particular embarrassment he had occasioned her, she observed with concern that his judgment and discretion had not by any means increased since she had last beheld him.

"Here is still another proof that I am not entirely in a wilderness," said she, presenting to him the billet. "Will you enable me to reply satisfactorily to the kind attention of this newly-acquired and valuable friend?"

"The Rectory!" exclaimed he, throwing the paper on the table. "Oh the devil!—the Parson's wife I suppose? No, faith, excuse me! But I will accompany you with alacrity to the St. Ormes—— where do they reside?"

"They are with Mrs. Aubrey," replied Laura, giving the intelligence most unwillingly, in the fear that it would operate to detain her unwelcome guest longer than he might otherwise have thought proper to extend his very charitable visit.

"With

"With Mrs. Aubrey!" repeated he; "that is strange—yet as it is so, *allons* to the Rectory by all means! How could this Mrs. Aubrey contrive to become introduced to the St. Ormes? He is, I know, as dashing a young fellow as any about town, and I should as soon have looked for a French regiment on London Bridge, as have expected to have beheld him immured in such a place as this! Taking a rural walk with his sister too! The man has lost his senses——Ah, *votre pardon!* he was advancing hither, to behold the fair recluse of Adwan! Yes, yes! you blush, Laura——nay, do not affect to deny it—let me have the honour of informing you, that if you have had the good fortune to inspire St. Orme with an attachment, you are decidedly the most lucky creature in the universe! And observe, I claim your interest with the sister."

Laura, at once disgusted and dismayed at the assured levity, the volubility, and undaunted folly of her companion, was eagerly

eagerly anxious to check his intended attack upon the St. Ormes, and imagined that the only method of lessening his inclination to meet them, would be to hint the occasion of their present seclusion: but, alas! a hint was not by any means sufficiently satisfactory or comprehensive for Captain Rothemere; and, to her extreme mortification, she discovered that nothing less than a very circumstantial narrative would quiet his impetuous and repeated enquiry.

"D—n the unreasonable old devil!" exclaimed he: "married again, and cast off the first brood!——it's the way with them all—upon my soul, I'm sorry for it! cursedly chagrined I suppose poor St. Orme is too! Ha, well thought of! Does he mean to sell his curricle? But that is gone already, I dare swear;—his *Sly-boots* though—a famous fine creature, he has not been transferred, or the world would have heard it! I will give him three hundred guineas for Sly-boots, and that is more by fifty than any other man in

in England will offer!—Has he got him here? Is he at Adwan?"

"Good Heavens! no," ejaculated Laura, in an agony—"how is it possible that you can think of——dear Sir, let me conjure you not to mention such a thing!—it will seem—it will appear so very——"

Captain Rothemere threw himself into a chair—for he had hitherto been walking about the room—and yielded to a fit of laughter, which required all the forbearance and the philosophy of Laura to endure without any very apparent symptom of contempt and anger.

"My dear girl, discard that rueful countenance," exclaimed he, endeavouring to recover his former degree of comparative gravity, "or I shall inevitably relapse! I perceive there is an *affaire du cœur* between you and St. Orme, which I very much commend you for entering into, as it will not only be an amusement during your seclusion, but afford you an opportunity of consulting the tastes and expectations of a man of fashion, for a future

future speculation; for however the fortunes of St. Orme have fallen, he has been, I assure you, much caressed in the first circles! But you are not putting yourself in train to accompany me to the Parsonage; and I am impatient to see him!"

"Let me entreat that you will not speak to him of this horse you mentioned," said Laura, with a supplicating mien and an earnest accent: "it may remind him of his situation most unpleasantly—most cruelly! As for your ironical conjectures concerning me, if they amuse you, Sir, I will endeavour to hear them without much vexation; nor will I excite your further raillery, by protesting against a mere jest: but I hope you will not repeat it in the presence of any one, who could be so much mistaken as to suspect you of being serious!"

"Upon my soul," exclaimed he, regarding her attentively as she spoke, "I never observed you to resemble Mrs. Rothemere so much as at this moment! That slight bend of the brow, which she had

had when she was very pensive, you have caught exactly; but you have more spirit in your countenance, Laura, with the same sweetness—and then the bloom of youth!—My dear child, I am convinced your destiny will still be splendid, notwithstanding this d——d *faux pas* of Lady Bellingham, which, to say the truth, when first I heard, I thought would be such a blighter to your prospects, that you would not be able to overcome it."

Laura, finding her representation and entreaties so entirely unavailing, and saddened by this careless mention of Mrs. Rothemere, with a heavy heart threw on her pelisse, and informed him that she was ready to walk with him.

CHAP.

CHAP. VIII.

As they were quitting the house, the servant of Captain Rothemere ventured to remind him that he had not received any instructions; and enquired if he was to procure another chaise, which was only to be obtained, he had learned, at the distance of three or four miles from Adwan.

"Get me a bed in the village," replied his master; "I shall remain here a day or two."

Laura was not so much disconcerted at this intelligence as she might have found herself, had it been wholly unexpected; but she well remembered that Rothemere was one of those unhappy beings who, becoming daily more idle for lack of proper employment, after having with considerable

considerable effort transported themselves to any particular spot, will from mere sloth adhere to it, until chance or imperious necessity remove them to another station.

On his way to the Rectory, he informed Laura that his regiment was in winter quarters at the inconsiderable distance of fourteen miles, and that he should consequently be enabled to renew his visit very frequently.—"I suppose," added he, "that you will be suffered to remain here until affairs are a little arranged at Bellingham House, and a proper *chaperon* procured to reside with you there: but if the Marquis does not shortly bring you forward, as I consider myself interested in your welfare, I shall take the liberty of representing to him the very great injustice he does you."

Laura contented herself with observing, in reply to this intimation, that she could not entertain a doubt but her situation would be well considered, before any plan respecting her were determined upon; and wherever Lord Bellingham

should think proper to place her, she should believe it her duty to acquiesce in his decision.

Captain Rothemere was endeavouring to convince her, with infinite vivacity of accent and manner, of the folly of such a tame and imbecile mode of conduct, when Laura rung the gate bell of the Rectory; and he instantly changed the topic to a dissertation upon the passable decency of the dwelling, and its attendant conveniences and inconveniences, which he discussed even after the servant had appeared, with as much warmth as if he had been on the point of becoming a purchaser of the premises.

Mrs. Aubrey received him with that happy mixture of urbanity and ease he was far from expecting in the personage his imagination had sketched out; and he was rather disconcerted to find himself in the society of a well-bred woman, whom he had insisted upon supposing a mere machine to make shirts and cook dinners for a corpulent son of the Church. Because he had not found her such a being,

being, he instantly exalted her in his quickly varying opinion, to an altitude equally chimerical; and the Parson's wife, whom a few minutes before he could scarcely be prevailed upon to honour with a civil reply to an hospitable invitation, was now the most charming woman the world ever produced; and in another half hour Captain Rothemere discovered that he was inclined to have an attachment for her.

Laura was pleasingly surprised to observe that he now dismissed a great portion of the airy petulance she had before witnessed, and threw over his absurdities the forbearing decency that had formerly veiled them, when almost unconsciously he had yielded to the entreating eye of Mrs. Rothemere, which could alone check or restrain him. But, alas! the entrance of Caroline St. Orme and her brother, who did not return from their *promenade* until some time after he had made his *début*, overthrew the reputation he was almost acquiring with his fair hostess, and he became again a very

fluent orator on very variegated topics, and a man of high *ton*, in his own estimation.

St. Orme had evidently some knowledge of him; but he was very cold in his salutation, and apparently chagrined to meet at such a moment, any one who had seen him in that independent situation it was very doubtful if he could ever more assume. His reserve, however, produced not the smallest effect upon the familiar tone of Captain Rothemere, who mentioned in the usual terms the plan of the last grand entertainment given by a great lady, which he applauded or censured as it happened, commented upon the last serious ballet, and the new dancer it was meant to bring forward, who had attracted every human being in London; and then descanted on the probability that the candidate for the vacancy at Brookes's would be black-balled.

But St. Orme pursued each of these subjects with great indifference, and Captain Rothemere then thought proper to start others: he declaimed on the prudence

prudence and popularity of Ministers, applauded their measures, and protested he would support them to extremity with his voice and his arm. He then reverted to the little chance Lady Albina or Lady Almeria had of obtaining establishments during the season now commencing, enumerated the divorces which must shortly take place, and foretold with significant wisdom, several *culbutes* in St. James's Street and on the turf. Yet his prospect of success in animating St. Orme momentarily diminished, for he evidently betrayed increasing symptoms of weariness and impatience; and the indefatigable Rothemere then addressed himself to Caroline: but she was disqualified from taking a part in the conversation he sought, by the discomposure of her brother; and as the worthy Captain felt something very much resembling respect mingled in his admiration of Mrs. Aubrey, Laura was the succeeding object of his flippant attention, whom he addressed, *sans cérémonie*, with an obliging air of kindness and protection, and in

the same terms he had been some years back accustomed to use, when she would with eager joy have accepted a challenge to skip, or play at battledore.

She experienced the utmost chagrin and mortification at the thoughtless impropriety of his conduct, because she discerned that even Mrs. Aubrey was disgusted by it; and that the glances of St. Orme betrayed a contemptuous indignation, that appeared to extend to herself.

The anxiety this observation created was however rather soothed by the same sweetness of deportment which her friend Caroline had ever exhibited towards her, and by the increased gentleness and the most affectionate consideration from Mrs. Aubrey, who exerted herself equally to repress her own disapprobation of Mr. Rothemere, and to calm the rising emotions of more confirmed dislike that shot from the eyes of Cecil, when he turned them upon the intruder.

During the dinner, Laura could not avoid observing that her tormentor drank much

much more wine than she had ever remarked other people to take at so private a table as that where he was then, most unhappily for her repose, seated so much *en famille:* and she was glad, when the repast was over, to escape for some little time, the increasing misery of listening to the flighty and rodomontade ideas that passed his lips the moment after they had floated on his brain.

"Can this man," thought she, "have been the actual choice of Mrs. Rothemere? What strange fatality could so much warp her judgment, or what cruel necessity operate to induce her to exist in perpetual disgust and irksome restraint with such a companion?"

The remembrance of the invariable patience with which a wife so amiable and respected, had endured all the inequalities and infirmities of his mind and temper, and the veneration due from herself to the memory of a being so beloved, enabled Laura, however, to rally her own forbearing powers, and disperse some part of the disdainful vexation that swelled

her bosom: and painful though she found the task, she had resolved not to suffer any disapproving sentence or regard to escape her, when after an interval of greater length than was consistent with decorum, as the master of the house was absent, Captain Rothemere acceded to the repeated hints of St. Orme, and consented to attend the tea-table.

The *tête-à-tête* to which they had been left, had not increased the good understanding between them, and Mrs. Aubrey, as well as Laura, could not avoid observing that Cecil appeared highly irritated, and with the most marked disdain and mingled rage turned from the object that inspired such unpleasant emotions; who having contrived thus to impress the mind of the brother, proceeded with perfect *nonchalance* to honour the sister with his peculiar attentions.

"What has he been mad and inconsiderate enough to say?" thought Laura, whose inquietude increased with the evident displeasure of St. Orme. "Good G—d!

G—d! can he really have been importuning him to sell his horses or his carriage—or has he in any other manner betrayed a knowledge of his situation?"

As the children had now been admitted to join the party, Captain Rothemere forgot not at intervals to incite the boys to riotous sports, for which their mother was repeatedly compelled to check them; and as the little girl was more timid, she was terrified and teazed into a fit of crying, which Mrs. Aubrey gladly made a pretext for dismissing them all.

Laura deeply blushed for him; she blushed that he could claim any right to be admitted to her society, and was still more shocked at the wound which his conduct inflicted upon the prudence and judgment of his departed wife. Mrs. Aubrey, to whom she had often with overflowing gratitude vaunted the goodness and virtues of this regretted being, seemed to comprehend the distress she endured, and would not increase it, by appearing sensible of the situation of the guest Laura had been the means of intro-

ducing to her little peaceful dwelling: for in fact the spirits of Captain Rothemere were much elevated by the quantity of wine he had swallowed, which co-operated very powerfully with their natural volatility.

He now even ventured to attack Mrs. Aubrey herself; and importuned her to conduct her fair friends to a ball, to be given the following week by the officers of the regiment to which he belonged: but she very dexterously evaded his urgency, without affording him any pretext to consider himself offended. St. Orme, however, rather too unceremoniously insinuated that his sister was not in the habits of attending parties so indiscriminately collected.

Caroline coloured, and looked distressed at this hostile refusal of what she believed to be meant as a civility; but Captain Rothemere himself, not in the least disconcerted, turned to Laura, exclaiming—

"You, however, will undoubtedly be there! I shall ride over and escort you to

to B——, from whence I will contrive to procure you a *chaperon:* I shall consider *your* presence, therefore, as a settled thing; and perhaps we shall be eloquent enough to induce Mrs. Aubrey to accompany us."

"Indeed your eloquence would be disgraced by certain defeat," replied she; "and I advise you not to think of exerting it, where it must assuredly prove unsuccessful, since both of necessity and inclination, two things you will not expect to vanquish, I shall not desert my home. I suspect too that Miss Delaunie will not be entirely satisfied with a *chaperon*, whom she has not some little previous knowledge of."

"Oh, as to Laura," replied he, "she would be perfectly contented with my single protection! But you know, my dear Madam, we must attend to established customs—we must consult decorum—we must respect the opinion of the world—in short——"

Laura observing a smile of irony even upon the lips of Caroline St. Orme, and

the still increasing expression of disgust in the aspect of her brother, felt her patience wholly forsake her when the first part of the assertion reached her ear; and she might perhaps have attempted to interrupt his elocution upon the duties of decorum, but that she was sensible it was a more difficult task than she could accomplish, without an elevation of voice she was unwilling to exert.

But though Laura could not in the present instance arrest his career of volubility, it received a gentle check from the sudden retreat of St. Orme, who left the room with a precipitation that alarmed his sister, and after a short interval she followed.

"Poor fellow!" ejaculated Captain Rothemere, after a momentary silence; "I never beheld a plucked pigeon so cursedly sunk!—low, damnably low upon every possible subject! I merely made a casual enquiry into the issue of a certain arrangement allowedly spoken of by all St. Orme's friends, and I expected he would have flown up the chimney!"

"Oh,

"Oh, for pity's sake," exclaimed Laura, scarcely sensible of what she uttered, "consider what you are saying!—consider——"

"My dear girl, I always do," returned he, employing his toothpick with great deliberation; and he then resumed his solicitations that Mrs. Aubrey would accompany her to the military ball.

"To say the truth," added he, "I have already promised the hand of Laura to a young friend of mine, who was a very early conquest of the fair Miss Delaunie; and he will be in despair if she should disappoint him. You remember Biranly, Laura—indeed you have reason to remember him, since I know that he was your first attachment: he is now in the same regiment with myself, and delighted to hear that you are in the neighbourhood."

"My first attachment!" repeated Laura, in great consternation.

"Yes, certainly: but if you have formed a better, it is very natural that you should wish to sink the other—so we will

will not amplify upon an unpleasant subject—and I believe the best thing I can do, will be to bring him over, to urge his own suit."

"Oh no, I conjure you!" exclaimed she; "reflect, Captain Rothemere, that the Marquis——"

"My dear Laura," interrupted Mrs. Aubrey, very gravely, "Captain Rothemere amuses himself with your credulity: he has too much good sense and good-nature, I am convinced, to wish you to hazard any improper surmise, or render yourself subject to unpleasant imputations."

This very plain innuendo was construed by him into a compliment, and he assured Mrs. Aubrey that the good opinion of a lady of her evident discernment, gave him infinite satisfaction.

"I desire," he added, turning to Laura, "that you will be assured of my attention to the most minute propriety—and that I cannot propose to you any deviation from its strictest rules. I have

too

too much consideration for your welfare, to lead you into an error."

Chagrined as she had been at the effects of his folly, Laura could scarcely forbear smiling at the solemnity of this assertion, which was enforced by the extreme gravity of his aspect.

Without any particular invitation, he took his seat at the supper-table, which St. Orme did not attend; and Laura experienced the mortification of believing that the guest so unwillingly introduced by her, had driven him from the little social board where his apprehensions and griefs had almost been forgotten, and that Captain Rothemere had renewed, by his absurd and boyish want of reflection, the gloomy ideas of degradation and penury that appeared to weigh so heavily on his mind.

Caroline, influenced by the private sentiments of her brother, which she had had an opportunity of learning, now regarded poor Rothemere with a cold disapprobation Laura too well guessed the source of.

"I shall

"I shall be included, no doubt," thought she, "in the contemptuous opinion St. Orme entertains but too justly of—another; and I must lose in his sister such a friend as I can never again expect to meet!"

This idea saddened her almost to tears; and Mrs. Aubrey, who observed her dejection, having taken occasion to comment upon the damp coldness of the evening, told her that if she would be contented to endure the confined accommodation it was alone in her power to offer her during the night, she would endeavour to prevail upon her to remain at the Rectory.

Laura had felt the impropriety of returning home, where she must singly receive Captain Rothemere, if he chose to remain at the village; and would have joyfully accepted a proposition she divined the motive of, but that she could not allow herself to inflict upon her kind friend and her amiable inmates the continued torment of such an associate as she found her presence would entail upon them:

them: for she perceived that he had not the least idea of forbearance; and that a hint or any application, indirect or otherwise, made no impression on his feelings or his conduct.

Mrs. Aubrey, however, easily overruling the feeble objections she advanced, Laura remained at her hospitable mansion; and at length, much after their usual hour of retiring, Mr. Rothemere condescended to withdraw, having previously invited himself to breakfast the next morning.

After his departure, Laura in a hesitating voice attempted an acknowledgment to Mrs. Aubrey for the kind attentions so little considered or deserved; but her wearied spirits wholly failed in the effort, and she burst into tears.

Caroline St. Orme was shocked: she felt something of compunction for her own ungracious deportment during the latter part of the evening, and a little displeasure against her brother for his too violent resentment of the folly and impertinence she now thought he should have

have disregarded, since his petulance must have hurt the feelings of Laura.

Mrs. Aubrey soothed her for some time, but without hinting her knowledge of the subject of her regrets; and Caroline, with a countenance of solicitude, silently waited her returning composure, which it required considerable effort to regain.

"Pardon me, dear Madam," exclaimed Laura, "forgive me, Miss St. Orme, for this weakness—produced by recollections Mr. Rothemere so forcibly occasions, of a loss I must ever deplore!"

"I freely pardon the effects of a sensibility I cannot disapprove," returned Mrs. Aubrey, "but not the apology you appear to think necessary. I will not however continue my censure at present, my amiable Laura, because it becomes late, and I hope repose will renew your serenity. We will now therefore separate, and to-morrow I expect you will be cheerful."

When Laura arose the next morning, by the attention of Mrs. Aubrey, she

was

was attended by Dolly, who exclaimed, as she gazed round her with satisfaction and approbation—

"Lauk, Madam, what a neat little place this is! It an't so fine as Adwan to be sure, nor a good bit so spacious and grand; but when folks has a good name, what matters that?—here's none of your *devoces* here, nor your heart-burnings, nor your back-bitings! Lauk, Miss Laura, they says as Mr. Rothemere, when he came to the great house—for he didn't sleep at the village, 'cause there wasn't a place, as Mrs. Smith said, fit for a gentleman; so, Ma'am, as he came to see you, he was axed to sleep at the Park. Well, Ma'am, nothing would sarve him when he got there, but he must see the house: so Mr. Tomlinson happened to be up, and William went and told him; so there they humoured him, for he was quite fuddled and afterwards Mr. Tomlinson sits down with him to a bottle of claret, and Will says they was at it till five this morning!"

Laura bit her lip, and sighed.

"So

"So you see, Ma'am, he an't mended a bit! It was a heart-breaking thing, to be sure, when Mrs. Rothemere died; but, poor dear lady, she's saved many a salt tear, and many a heart-ache by it!"

"I beg you will not say any more," said Laura gravely: "Mrs. Rothemere, whose memory you, Dolly, have reason to revere as well as myself, never allowed herself any disrespectful mention of her husband, and I will endeavour to act as she did!"

"I say any thing disrespectful! No, Ma'am, I'd burn my tongue first!" returned Mrs. Maunder: "she was a good lady to me, and had me taught what I should niver have learned without her; so it an't my part to say a word against her kinsfolk or friends—no more I shall! Only I just said it to you, Miss Laura, because you have knowed all the Captain's pranks many a good year; so there was no harm in telling you of 'em!"

Laura repeated her injunction in stronger terms, and then descended to the breakfast-room, where she found Caroline

Caroline seated in a very thoughtful attitude; but she arose at her entrance, and saluted her with cordiality and kindness.

"You will be surprised to hear that my brother is on his way to London," said she: "he left the Rectory above an hour since, and charged me to express his regret to you that he could not await your rising to bid you adieu. His departure was hastened, he said, by a letter from a particular friend, which was given to him yesterday evening."

Laura was speechless at this intelligence.

"He has fled," thought she, "to avoid Mr. Rothemere!"

"Cecil took an early breakfast," continued Miss St. Orme, "with our little cousins; and our good Mrs. Aubrey could not prevail with him to defer his journey until the return of her husband. There was something very unpleasant I fear in that unlucky letter—I cannot imagine to what it relates; for he assured me it was entirely independent of the disagreement with our father, but which his

his presence in town could alone settle.—You are displeased with him, and perhaps with me," resumed Caroline, after a pause, in which she vainly awaited an answer from her companion: "indeed he conducted himself strangely yesterday; but his mind is harassed, and I hope you will excuse him. For myself, I will endeavour to retrieve my credit in your opinion, and in that of Mr. Rothemere. I know not how it happened, but I felt uncomfortable when I beheld Cecil so grave; and I fear I gave you occasion to think me very ill tempered."

"Oh do not thus, I entreat you, add to my confusion!" interrupted Laura: "it is I who should express my regrets that Mr. St. Orme and yourself should have so——indeed, indeed I am extremely concerned that you should have been thus associated with a stranger, who could not sympathize in your present anxiety!"

The entrance of Mrs. Aubrey relieved Laura from a conversation, in which she felt embarrassed in what manner to represent

represent her chagrin at the intrusion of Captain Rothemere, without betraying the sense she entertained of his conduct.

A considerable time after the hour mentioned to him, he appeared; and she beheld in his still inflamed aspect and heavy eye, the effect of his late vigil, which he little suspected had already met the ear of any one at the Rectory: but as his brain was still in considerable confusion from a consciousness of the circumstance, he preserved some guard over his conduct.

When he perceived the absence of St. Orme, Caroline replied to his enquiry by repeating the occasion of her brother's absence; and as she now severely taxed her patience and good humour in compliment to the feelings of Laura, and received the attentions of Rothemere with tolerable complacency, he instantly flattered himself that the handsome sister of the proud St. Orme had become the captive of his seductive graces; and in this happy idea he tortured Caroline the whole day, which he passed without

scruple

scruple at the Rectory, by obstinately persisting in the most absurd efforts to improve this imaginary predilection: an attempt that betrayed him into such numberless fopperies, and produced a display of such ridiculous pretensions, that when Laura again laid her head upon her pillow, she wept with mortification, whilst her chagrin was at intervals interrupted by sudden and uncontroulable sensations of merriment at the follies that rose to her recollection.

CHAP. IX.

THE third day from his arrival relieved the whole party; for he was then compelled to return to the place where his regiment was quartered: but he failed not to urge to the last moment the presence of Mrs. Aubrey and her young friends at the intended *fête*, and at his

departure again threatened Laura with a visit from Captain Biranly, who still remembered her, he said, with particular interest.

She was now seriously alarmed at this repeated intimation, for she feared the visits of this young man, which Mr. Rothemere appeared so well inclined to encourage, would inevitably reach the knowledge of Lord John or the Marquis, and plunge her perhaps into disgrace with one or both.

The present object of her inquietude was the second son of a Peer, whose whole revenue was to be found upon the pension list: he had been introduced to Mrs. Rothemere by her husband whilst they resided in Dorsetshire, when he was yet a tall lad of sixteen, carrying a pair of colours about the country of which his father was an hereditary senator, with a very light heart, and scarcely a shilling in his pocket to pay the postage of those letters of remonstrance, carrying the superscription of the Honourable Henry Biranly, which unhappily were very fre-

quently addressed to him by the friend who had procured him his commission, and from whose interest he expected promotion.

Mrs. Rothemere was pleased with his perfect good-humour, and compassionated his untutored youth and dangerous situation, which rendered him responsible as a man for the follies of a boy: she gently checked the extravagances her husband would have encouraged, who laughed at the restraints imposed by prudence and discretion, whilst she exhorted the young Ensign, for the sake of his future peace and happiness, to attend to their dictates.

Biranly liked the society of Captain Rothemere, and generally preferred the tenor of his lectures to those of his wife: but he highly respected her, and wild as he was, regretted that his mother had not resembled the only being his levity had ever suffered him to listen to with patience and conviction.

Laura, on their first acquaintance, was too young to attract his attention but

but as a lovely child, upon whom, however, he lavished as many useless presents as the very limitted extent of his purse would allow; but after an absence of three years from his native country, in which time he had been promoted to a Lieutenancy, upon his return he flew to his Dorsetshire friends, even before he visited his family; and as Laura was the first handsome girl he had beheld, except an innkeeper's daughter, whom he had much admired in his hasty progress, he lost no time in parting with his heart, which in truth was still a present by no means of the common stamp, for it was yet entirely free from cares, inquietudes, griefs, alarms, envy, ambition, jealousies, and vexations of every kind.

He remained in Dorsetshire, under the influence of his youthful attachment, and the satisfaction he tasted with his friends, whom alone he had regretted in his exile, so long, that his father, who was not apprized of his destination, had serious thoughts of advertising him in handbills and in the daily papers.

But at length Mrs. Rothemere succeeded in persuading her husband of the propriety of adding his admonitions to her's, to induce Biranly to visit the paternal roof; and very unwillingly he left them, with the hope of returning when the ceremonials of family duties and attentions were fulfilled.

He found charms, however, in the dissipations of the metropolis, to counterbalance the *agrémens* he had experienced with his rural associates; and in a few months his father, who now possessed a lucrative place in addition to his pension, procured him a company, and paid the debts he had contracted, upon condition that he immediately joined his regiment, and abstained from the fascinating delights of London for a given period.

To these impertinent stipulations he was compelled to submit; but he found means to make a very circuitous route whilst he obeyed the former injunction, that he might state to the Rothemeres in person the necessity he was in of foregoing

going the visit he had promised himself. His heart then received a second shock from the improved beauty of Laura, whilst his feelings were still more seriously wounded by observing the decayed health of her revered friend, whose death, when he heard it, he sincerely lamented.

Captain Biranly had now acquired more experience and knowledge of mankind; but though he could make a considerable allowance for his former want of discrimination, he could scarcely imagine it possible that the absurdities which were at present so conspicuous in the character of Rothemere, should have hitherto existed, so entirely unobserved by him, young as he was, at the time when he was principally in the habit of associating with his family: and at length the enigma was solved by an officer, who like himself had seen and respected Mrs. Rothemere—from him he learned that her influence had ever been indefatigably exerted to make him appear in the eye of the world a reasonable being; and though she could not wholly succeed, she had at least

proved that her cares had not for the moment been unavailing, by the increased eccentricity of his conduct when she could no longer watch over it.

Yet Biranly still retained for him an habitual regard, preserved in part by the recollection of his former unrestrained hospitality, and still more from veneration to the memory of a woman he had so perfectly esteemed; and when from the communication of Captain Rothemere he learned that Laura Delaunie was in their neighbourhood, some remains of the interest he once felt for her, united with the *ennui* of his situation, and curiosity to ascertain if she was as engaging and handsome as he remembered her to have been, induced him to encourage the expedition his friend had for a fortnight past talked of undertaking. His particular mention therefore of Biranly had some foundation in truth, and was not, as Laura at intervals had hoped, the mere effect of his own suggestions: but fortunately for her feelings, neither Mr. St. Orme nor his sister had been present when

when this young man had been so confidently spoken of as her first attachment—an assertion that shocked her the more, as she was conscious of having received some satisfaction in those attentions which had been the first offerings to the beauty they distinguished; and she dreaded lest the girlish approbation she had long forgotten should be construed into past encouragement, and Biranly think himself authorized to accuse her of coquetry, for the repugnance she now experienced to the repetition of sentiments she had formerly heard with the mere reserve of timidity.

But the apprehensions and discomposure the unexpected visit of Captain Rothemere had occasioned, gradually abated, and the mind of Laura was the prey of other regrets. Several days had passed by, and St. Orme returned not—he did not even write to his sister, as he had promised, and Caroline could not conceal her inquietude, in which Mrs. Aubrey secretly joined. Laura was miserable: she accused herself of being

the cause of his abrupt retreat, by having imparted to a being so little capable of delicacy and forbearance, the peculiarities of his situation; and her anxiety refused to be alleviated by the tale he had fabricated, of a letter that required his presence in London: it was even perpetually increased by the importunities of the children, who having been forbidden by their mother to apply to Caroline for the information they perpetually sought, daily enquired of Laura when she thought he would come back.

She had now returned to Adwan to sleep, for she would not incommode Mrs. Aubrey longer than was absolutely necessary; nor could she endure to occupy the apartment St. Orme had inhabited, when she considered herself as accessory to his having abandoned it with a precipitation, and at a moment so distressing: but as she was passing her hours as usual with her friends, Caroline one day expressed some inclination to see the house and private grounds of the Marquis; and both Mrs. Aubrey and Laura,

Laura, pleased with the hope that she might thus obtain a respite of a few hours from the tormenting inquietude that harassed her spirits, caught at the casual and half-expressed wish that had escaped her, and it was settled that Miss St. Orme should visit her young friend at the Park the next morning.

Laura had anxiously expected her until one o'clock, and now began to apprehend that her appearance was retarded by some serious accident:—impressed by this fear, she had resolved to walk over, and ascertain the reason of a delay so unexpected, when she heard the door of the antiroom open, and steps pass across it.

"Caroline is come!" she exclaimed, feeling the sudden alacrity which a relief from inquietude bestows; and flying forward to meet her friend, beheld a servant preceding Captain Rothemere and a stranger, whom she soon recognised to be Biranly.

The sudden alteration of her countenance, which could not have escaped an eye commonly observant, was entirely

lost upon the flighty Rothemere, whilst the many images that crowded to her remembrance, produced by the well-recollected figure and aspect of Captain Biranly—images that recalled the tenderness and considerate goodness of her lost preceptress, added to her distress.

"My dear Laura," said Mr. Rothemere, "I present to you a former associate of your's, who is charmed with the opportunity that permits him to claim a renewal of your ancient amity."

Laura, teazed by this *début*, which promised a succeeding tissue of inconsiderateness equally provoking and improper, felt an indignant colour suffuse her cheeks; and she coolly bowed to the compliment that immediately followed from the lips of Biranly, who appeared rather disconcerted at the opening speech of his conductor, and at the dignity with which it was received.

"We came over this morning," resumed Mr. Rothemere, "to inform you that our ball is fixed for Thursday: we shall remain in the vicinity of Adwan therefore

therefore until Thursday morning, when we expect to have the honour of escorting, not only your fair self, but Mrs. Aubrey and the gentle Caroline, to B——."

"Is it possible that you should have misunderstood Mrs. Aubrey," said Laura gravely, "when she so repeatedly declined this proposal when you were last here? Indeed, Sir, if such is your expectation, I believe it will be wholly disappointed."

"Not wholly I hope," said Biranly.

"Oh nonsense!" exclaimed his friend: "Laura cannot succeed in making us suppose that if she could not get to B——, she would not be the most chagrined of the party."

"I will not be so ungrateful," returned Laura, endeavouring to force a smile over her countenance, "to allow you to form a suspicion of my indifference for the success of your charitable expedition in my favour; but indeed my acknowledgments must be confined to

your good wishes; for Mrs. Aubrey I know is quite decided, and——"

"And is her prudish obstinacy to deter you from amusing yourself so unobjectionably?" interrupted Rothemere, irritated at her opposition, which he thought very impertinent: "did I not tell you that I could procure you a *chaperon* from B——? There is Mrs. Vernon, you know, Harry, who would ride over, I am certain, without hesitation, to oblige us."

"Or Lady Webber," said Biranly, "if Miss Delaunie will allow us to urge a point, against which I hope she has no particular objection—Lady Webber would I am assured think herself——"

"D—n the old witch!" exclaimed Rothemere violently: "there is not such a harpy in St. James's parish! She was not satisfied with fleecing poor Fanshaw last night; the cursed hyæna must claw me for forty pounds!"

Biranly bit his lip at the wisdom of his friend, in thus displaying to the utmost

advantage

advantage the character of the lady he had however wished to recommend in preference to Mrs. Vernon, who was in fact the more improper person of the two.

"If Lady Webber is so dangerous a personage," said Laura, "I am not courageous enough to trust myself near her: and I thank you, Mr. Rothemere, for your candid information."

"*Persiflage* is not your *forte*, child," returned he: "indeed I think it very insolent in any woman to attempt a thing of that kind——it is confoundedly unbecoming in most of your sex, and I would advise you to drop that tone. If you object to the old hag however, who is quite good enough though, let me tell you, for a *chaperon*, why there is Mrs. Vernon, the most engaging creature in the world, without fault or blemish!"

"*You* made the eulogium of Lady Webber," said Laura, with a smile, "and I expect that Captain Biranly will in return favour me with that of Mrs. Vernon."

"What

"What have you heard of Mrs. Vernon?" demanded Rothemere, hastily, and preventing his friend, who was beginning to reply to this hint. "I assure you, upon my honour, it is the calumny of the prudes of her own sex, and the disappointed ones of our's—rank calumny and envy at her superior beauty and wit! But that is of little consequence to a woman whose mind is so far above the tattle of silly gossips!"

Laura, who had by this exculpation of her champion, completely ascertained the character of the lady under whose protection Mr. Rothemere was so earnest to place her, was now more incensed against him than she had ever yet suffered herself to be, since his intentions, even if they proceeded from extreme inconsiderateness, if she had weakly yielded to them, might have done her an irreparable injury.

"You have now," replied she, with a very grave countenance, "sufficiently discussed the merits of either lady; and any further comment from yourself or Captain Biranly is wholly unnecessary."

"Well,

"Well, now you are a reasonable being!" exclaimed Rothemere, shaking her hand with an air of great cordiality. "Mrs. Vernon shall then ride over on Wednesday evening, and you can accompany her——"

At this moment Laura distinguished the voices of the little Aubreys in the adjoining room; and hastily disengaging herself from Rothemere, flew to the door, which she opened, and discovered that their mother accompanied them, but not Caroline.

"What has happened?" asked Laura, in terror. "Dear Madam! where is Miss St. Orme?"

"She remains with my good man," replied Mrs. Aubrey, "who returned about an hour and a half since: he is much fatigued, or he would have walked hither; so I must conduct you to him."

Laura impatiently wished to enquire into the success of his embassy; but she was now assisted by Mr. Rothemere in recalling to her memory that she had other and less welcome companions; for

he advanced to Mrs. Aubrey with the air of a long and approved acquaintance, and introduced to her his worthy friend Captain Biranly, who was now again shocked at the coldness with which this annunciation of his name was received.

Mrs. Aubrey felt indeed much embarrassed between her natural frankness and hospitality, and the entire disapprobation she experienced of this inconsiderate and very indelicate repetition of the visit of Rothemere, accompanied by another person, who was a still more improper guest for Laura to receive; aggravated by the inconvenience of the moment too!—when her husband weary, and wishing to indulge himself in the society of his family, must feel averse from the trouble of receiving strangers, who would undoubtedly suppose themselves entitled to every exertion of courtesy.

Biranly, who had attended to the few sentences that had passed between Laura and her friend, and had sense enough to perceive that his presence was then inconvenient and unwished for, informed his companion

companion that he was proceeding immediately to the place they had fixed upon for their temporary residence, which was the next post-town, and enquired if he chose to accompany him.

"By no means," replied Rothemere, with an air of surprise; "I wish to be presented first to Mr Aubrey!"

"I may perhaps be equally desirous of the same honour," replied the other; "but I should wish to find a proper time to solicit it. I will therefore bid you farewell for the present."

And with a silent salutation to Mrs. Aubrey and Laura, he vanished.

"Stay, Harry!" exclaimed Rothemere: "where the devil are you flying in such a confounded hurry?"

If this remonstrance were heard, it was not attended to, for Biranly neither returned nor replied; and his friend expressing a fear that the whimsical fellow might ride back to B——, pursued him.

"My dear Miss Delaunie," said Mrs. Aubrey, "I am distressed that I cannot appear to pay that attention to Captain Rothemere

Rothemere and his companion which my esteem and affection for you would impel me to, were their visit, situated as you are, entirely proper: but indeed Captain Rothemere should consider——"

"Ah, Madam!" interrupted Laura, "if he had ever possessed consideration, would he——"

She paused, and her friend continued.

"Could I but defer the invitation Mr. Rothemere evidently expects until to-morrow, my good man would be better enabled to receive them; for at present he has not only fatigue to oppress him, but lowered spirits, as he has not succeeded with Sir William St. Orme by any means to the extent of his expectations, and he is chagrined that Cecil should at this moment be in town: indeed he fears——"

"Not succeeded!" repeated Laura, in extreme agitation: "Oh Heaven! what will become of——but you were saying, dear Madam—I mean—that is, I entreat you not to bestow a second thought upon the inclination expressed by Mr. Rothemere

mere to be admitted to the Rectory to-day—he may now be returning possibly to B——, without any further idea of pressing it; and even if he should——"

The subject of their conversation at this moment re appeared, panting with the haste he had used, and exclaimed that Biranly had mounted his horse, and had rode off, before he could overtake him.

"Since it is so," said Mrs. Aubrey, "and you may probably wish to follow your friend, perhaps I may inform Mr. Aubrey that you will partake our family dinner to-morrow, at which we shall be equally flattered to see Captain Biranly."

"To-morrow!" repeated he—"Oh, the very thing! Mrs. Aubrey, upon my soul you are an angel of a woman! I will now pursue this runaway fellow, and tell him of the undeserved favour that awaits him."

Then nodding a farewell to Laura, he darted away.

"Ah, Madam!" said Laura, regarding her amiable friend with an anxious countenance,

countenance, "your urbanity has entailed upon you some unpleasant and most unprofitable hours!"

"My dear Miss Delaunie," replied she, "I will inform you without disguise of the motive of this supposed urbanity; by indulging the wish of Captain Rothemere to be presented to Mr. Aubrey, I shall give my good man an opportunity of representing to him, at a moment when perhaps he may be inclined to listen to him without displeasure, the extreme impropriety of thus intruding in your residence, situated as you now happen to be: and this admonition, given in the presence of his companion, may perhaps have the wished for effect upon both."

She then called her children, who were playing in the other room, and Laura accompanied their mother and them to their peaceful home.

CHAP.

CHAP. X.

MR. AUBREY received her with his accustomed symptoms of friendship; and after Laura had remained with him nearly half an hour, without having the courage to make the enquiries she was yet anxious to advance, she could no longer curb her impatience to seek Miss St. Orme, who had retired to her apartment.

Having tapped more than once at the door, and finding this signal not attended to, Laura was withdrawing in disappointment, from a supposition that her friend might have walked out unheeded by the family, but that she thought she distinguished from within the chamber some deep sobs;—without further hesitation she opened the door, and found Caroline indulging the grief she had restrained in the

the presence of the good Mr. Aubrey, who was already sufficiently mortified at the account he had been compelled to give.

"Oh, why—why do you weep thus?" exclaimed Laura, springing towards the mourner, whom she pressed to her bosom.

"My brother!" returned she; "poor Cecil—— !"

"Mr. St. Orme!" repeated Laura, the colour forsaking her cheeks; "is he then—is he ill?"

"Oh no, I hope not! but my father will not forgive him; and Lady St. Orme will not allow me to return home, that my poor Cecil, I suppose, may not have an advocate near him to soften his resentment. I am the cause of his misfortune; and I fear he will leave England and Europe, and die in some wretched climate, far from all who love him!"

Her tears, which this almost involuntary appeal to the commiseration of her friend had arrested for a moment, now redoubled; and as the suspected occasion of the unlucky absence of St. Orme from

from his best and most revered counsellors, instantly assailed the heart of Laura——at such a moment—at a period that might prove so critical, to be driven from them—"I am the hateful cause of his destruction," she secretly exclaimed, "and no one else!"

Her tears now flowed with those of Caroline.

"Can you forgive me," she cried, "for having conducted hither a man so displeasing to your brother as to have forced him from you? I am too certain that his disgust against Mr. Rothemere compelled him to leave this house!"

Caroline faintly denied it.

"His absence, however," added she, "from whatever cause it proceeds, I must yet hope will not be of any very serious import; for to-morrow Mr. Aubrey kindly travels to London, to reason with him, and endeavour to persuade him to return here, until something can be settled."

"To-

"To-morrow!" repeated Laura.

Again Mr. Rothemere, like an evil genius, appeared to her to intervene; and having tenderly entreated her friend not to indulge her further grief, she quitted her, to prevent Mrs. Aubrey, if it were not yet too late, from mentioning to her husband the unfortunate invitation she had given.

But as she entered his study, Mr. Aubrey immediately addressed her upon the subject; and lamenting the necessity of his absence, proved it incontestibly to the distressed Laura, by producing a letter he had received from Cecil St. Orme, that had been dispatched to him whilst he was yet in the neighbourhood of his father. It intimated that he was compelled to return to London upon business of extreme importance to himself, as it would, if he succeeded in accomplishing it, be the means of removing him without dishonour, from the pursuit of that insolence and those sneers he found himself but too well inclined to resent,

resent, and which his altered fortunes would eternally subject him to in England.

"I am convinced," he added, "that the negotiation you have had the generous friendship to undertake, will not be concluded to your satisfaction; but I hope that the woman who governs my father, will not have sufficient influence to prevent the proper establishment of Caroline.

"I would not have addressed this to you where you are, or written at this moment, but that I think myself compelled to account to you for leaving your hospitable roof in your absence, and with a precipitation that may appear capricious and ungrateful; and I wish to be the first to inform you of it: but to convince you that I cannot have any view to alter the resolutions of Sir William, whatever they may be, by what might otherwise appear an indirect threat, were it communicated to him, I think it

necessary to state to you that ere you receive this, my destiny will be decided."

"Most unhappily," said Mr. Aubrey, when he supposed that Laura had concluded the letter she still held in her trembling hands. "I had left Hereford on the morning this reached it; and it was sent by the people of the post-house to the residence of Sir William, who forwarded it in a blank cover, without any comment, to a place at which I had casually informed him I should stop in my route: but I remained only a few hours to transact some business, and the letter was too late. A second envelope brought it hither, a few minutes after Mrs. Aubrey had set out to the park to conduct you to us. I received it in the presence of Caroline; but I entertained some suspicions that the packet would not contain pleasing news, and I retired to read it, so that she is unacquainted with its contents."

"Do

"Do not cast away a thought upon Mr. Rothemere," exclaimed Laura, earnestly, "or upon his ill-timed visit; but hasten, dear Sir, hasten to rescue——" she hesitated—"the brother of Caroline St. Orme from the *destiny* he speaks of!"

"What does he mean by this expression?" asked Mrs. Aubrey.

"An exchange most probably," replied her husband, "into some regiment going abroad; and if so, I cannot——I will depart however by daybreak to-morrow: I would immediately renew my journey, but I find the inquietude I have lately suffered, added to personal fatigue, has rather disordered me, and I must allow myself this interval, I believe."

Mrs. Aubrey gazed anxiously on his countenance when he uttered this; and when he observed her alarm, he threw more alacrity into his features, and charged both Laura and herself to extenuate the inhospitality he appeared to commit towards Mr. Rothemere; and that it might not wear the garb of insult or neglect, he dictated to his friend, as

well as himself, an invitation to pass a second day at the Rectory, immediately upon his return.

Laura heard it with apprehension and regret: she dreaded the inconsiderate and forward familiarity of Rothemere, and feared he would take ample advantage of the complacency Mr. Aubrey thought himself compelled to exhibit, that his absence, so unluckily timed, might not be liable to misconstruction.

She had hitherto prevailed over her involuntary dislike and contempt of him, which she earnestly wished to conceal from others as well as himself, both from esteem and gratitude towards Mrs. Hamilton, and veneration for the memory of his wife, whom she regarded as her friend, her benefactress, and her deliverer from the ruinous and cruel system of Lady Bellingham, the effects of which her good sense had taught her to shudder at. But Mr. Rothemere was tolerated by the Aubreys, from a knowledge of the history of Laura's mother, and her obligations to the family of her husband,

who

who having distinguished her merits, and readily admitted them, had so liberally supported her in the eye of the world; and they thought it would not be right that the daughter should requite this kindness by disallowing the claim of Captain Rothemere to her respect, unconscious though she were of the circumstance that might have enforced it; but they hoped to render him sensible of the opinion other people might too probably conceive, were that unreserved intercourse still to subsist between them, which, from habit and want of reflection, he preserved. They knew little, however, of his waywardness, and his persevering obstinacy in a point which any one, by open representation or remonstrance, had endeavoured to turn him from: but Laura recollected enough of his former conduct to be convinced of this, and she experienced much anxiety for the event of those representations Mrs. Aubrey wished her husband to make.

When the family had assembled at their dinner, Miss St. Orme had so far overcome her feelings, as to conceal any very apparent distress, and she passed the remainder of the day with composure. At night, when she bade Mr. Aubrey farewell, she charged him with a letter for her brother, and commissioned the good man to inform him that she entirely expected his immediate return.

Mrs. Aubrey, who was better informed, was far less sanguine on this subject; and she now compelled Laura to occupy the apartment she feared St. Orme would not soon displace her from.

Some hours after Mr. Aubrey had begun his journey, though yet early in the day, this amiable woman, who in the absence of her husband was preceptress to the boys, had retired with them to the study, whilst Laura, endeavouring to amuse the mind of her young friend, had walked with her to the village, where she was herself well known and beloved, and they had paid several visits

to

to the cottages that principally composed it, when from the window of one of these little tenements, she beheld Captain Rothemere gallop past.

Laura had scarcely time to congratulate herself that he had not observed her, and was forming a hasty conjecture of the motive for this premature appearance, when Biranly, who was rather more leisurely following, recognised her, and checked his horse, from which he immediately sprung.

When the first salutation was over, and Laura and her friend, accompanied by him, were returning home, he said that at his instigation Captain Rothemere was conducting him thus early to the habitation of Mrs. Aubrey, that he might be enabled to ascertain if that lady had really commissioned him to deliver the flattering permission he had received to join her dinner party.

"Rothemere is I find," added he, with an expressive air, "so extremely figurative both in his representation of a nguage and sentiments, that having

been lately severely disappointed by attending rather too credulously to his rhetorical flourishes, I am apprehensive of being likewise deceived in this instance."

Laura felt some confusion at this hint; and, after a momentary pause, he resumed.

"Shall I venture to tell you, Miss Delaunie, that I was flattered into a hope that you had not forgotten those days of confidence and esteem, when I should not have experienced the mortification I yesterday subjected myself to, with a rashness I much regret?"

Laura, after some hesitation, endeavoured to make him comprehend that the reception he complained of, arose from her embarrassing situation, and the little regard his friend paid to it: but as she knew not how far the *rhetorical flourishes* of Mr. Rothemere might have extended, she distantly hinted her dread and horror of those well-known sallies, where truth and decorum were equally outraged.

He

He appeared at length satisfied with her explanation, and then implored both Miss St. Orme and herself to have the charity to inform him if he might rely upon the repeated protestations of his friend, and venture to present himself at the mansion of Mrs. Aubrey.

"I am so little entitled to be thus distinguished," added he, "that, independent of other trifling doubts that assail me, this circumstance alone is sufficient to make me fear that the honour he talks of is merely imaginary, and a conception of his own."

They gave him the confirmation he wished; which Caroline was enabled to do by having heard Mrs. Aubrey mention the necessity she had found herself in of sending to Captain Biranly a mere verbal intimation: and the assurance he urged had scarcely passed their lips, when his friend galloped furiously back, and, without any preface, began a vehement complaint against his desertion.

"I had even desired the servant at the Rectory to announce you," continued

Rothemere, in an impetuous accent, "and was actually dismounting myself, before I discovered that you had vanished! And that booby, that sacerdotal scrub, first stared at me like a baboon, and then grinned in my face! So I horsewhipped the blockhead for his stupid impudence, and rode back to seek you:——d—n it, I thought it very strange that every clown I passed should turn round, and stretch his hideous jaws at me—and I'll bet you a hundred to one, that whilst I supposed I was addressing you, the rascals thought I was making orations to the park-paling!"

Biranly found the eagerness and trepidation with which this well-founded complaint was uttered, wholly irresistible, and laughed heartily; nor could Laura or Miss St. Orme entirely refrain from following his example.

For a moment his friend appeared inclined to join in the mirth of which he was the object; but recovering a serious aspect—

"Biranly," resumed he, "this is not a jest to me, faith! For I was describing to

to you as I rode, a plan I had just digested, to collect upon any emergency the whole military force of the united kingdom in four-and-twenty hours, or in less time, upon either coast, as they might be wanted——and by G—d, I have lost it all!—not even a leading feature of the whole arrangement left!"

Biranly was more inclined to renew his laughter than bewail such a fatality; but with some difficulty he restrained himself, and endeavoured to sooth the mortification of the unlucky projector, who was soon appeased, and then recollected himself sufficiently to address the usual compliments to Miss St. Orme and Laura.

As the whole party proceeded towards the Rectory—"Rothemere," exclaimed his friend, "what excuse do you mean to offer to Mrs. Aubrey for chastising her servant, and instantly riding off like a mad devil, without giving any reason for such an outrage?"

"By G—d, that is true," replied he; "that question never occurred to me: I must hasten, and explain to her."

And suddenly spurring his horse, the animal started, and by the rapidity of his motions, as he flew off with his rider, threw some part of the mud of the road over Biranly and his fair companions.

"Our friend," said he, regarding Laura with a smile, "is still as youthful as I ever recollect him to have been."

To this hint she could not reply; for the wild and hurried deportment of Captain Rothemere reminded her of the intelligence Dolly had given her of his conduct when he had passed the night at Adwan; and she feared, from his appearance and manner, that he had spent the preceding one with as little regard to sobriety and his own health and character.

He had not attained the Rectory when the party reached it, notwithstanding the superior speed he had used; and Laura wondered what new caprice had drawn him from his intention. Her incertitude did not however last long; for before Mrs. Aubrey had been apprized of their return, a labouring man, who was running towards the house with all the rapidity

rapidity he could exert, called in an eager accent to the servant who was holding the horse of Biranly, and they all awaited the intelligence he appeared so anxious to give.

"The gentleman," said the fellow, panting for breath—"the gentleman as have rode backward and hitherward, as 'twere, for this hour or more, he——"

"What of him?" demanded Biranly hastily.

"He have had a tumble at the old leaping-bar in my Lord's park, just in the nook that comes out by the road-side; and the poor beast of a horse have broke its knees on the roots of the great oak tree!"

"And the gentleman?" asked Laura—"is he then unhurt?"

"Hurt! bless your Ladyship, yes! 'I thinks he have broke some bones; for he can't move a peg, so I come here for help!"

Biranly instantly rode off in the direction to which the man had pointed in telling his story, whilst Miss St. Orme and

and Laura flew to Mrs. Aubrey, who, having heard the disaster, directed the labourer to return to the unlucky spot, and give all the assistance in his power; and having dispatched one of her female servants to the nearest house for further help, she sent John, the *sacerdotal scrub*, to a neighbouring surgeon, to require his immediate attendance: nor was it until she had waited some time for the expected appearance of the unfortunate Rothemere, that she gave a single reflection to the extreme inconvenience a sick and additional guest must create in her family; for whose reception however, as it was irresistibly dictated by humanity, she immediately prepared.

After a considerable interval, the labourer who had first given the alarm, returned to say that the gentleman had been seen by some of the people belonging to the park, and they had carried him to the house whilst he came away for help: and the other gentleman desired him to say the accident was only a broken

broken leg, and he hoped it would not be a matter of serious concern.

Laura was not displeased to learn that Mrs. Aubrey would not be so materially incommoded by the consequences of this misadventure, so foolishly incurred by Captain Rothemere, as she had at the first moment apprehended; but she yet felt considerable inquietude that it had thus fixed him an inmate at Adwan for some time, which she almost equally feared would be disapproved by the Marquis.

By the same messenger, whom she liberally rewarded for his promptitude in offering his services, she sent to Dolly, to desire her to attend wholly to the invalid, and that she dispensed with her services to herself, until Mr. Rothemere were recovered: this care over, she pursued her anxious reflections upon the opinion Lord Bellingham might form when the circumstance reached his knowledge—more especially if Captain Biranly should think it necessary to remain with his friend.

"When

"When the news of the accident arrives at B——," thought Laura, her apprehensions increasing as her reverie lengthened, "Mr. Rothemere will probably be visited likewise by other officers of the regiment; and the Marquis hearing the story perhaps carelessly or malignantly related, may think himself justified in condemning me for the utmost forwardness and imprudence!"

The same idea having occurred to Mrs. Aubrey, she very delicately insinuated to Laura her opinion, that she should instantly send intelligence of the affair to Lord Bellingham, as the sufferer had been conveyed to his mansion: and thus authorized by the superior judgment of her friend, Laura having written what Mrs. Aubrey dictated, and sent her letter to the post-town by a villager, felt relieved from a considerable part of her anxiety upon this subject.

Soon after she had performed this duty, Biranly appeared, who informed Mrs. Aubrey and her young companions that the broken bone had been set; and as it

was

was only a simple fracture, his friend had had the pleasure of hearing that if he could prevail upon himself to be docile and quiet, he would do very well.

"And will he not consent?" said Laura, earnestly; "is he not——"

"Oh no, let me do him justice," interrupted Biranly; "he has not yet afforded any room for complaint on this point: and as docility and quietism are doctrines entirely strange to my friend Rothemere, I hope the charm of novelty will engage him to submit to them."

Mrs. Aubrey, who discovered that the mischance of his companion had not diminished the inclination of Biranly to avail himself of her original intention in his favour, confirmed with a good grace the invitation she could not withdraw; and he found himself so much charmed with his fair associates, that it required a considerable exertion of generosity and good-nature to quit them, which he compelled himself to do early in the evening, that he might pass an hour with the unlucky Rothemere, before he returned to the

the place where he had secured a lodging. But the following day again brought him to the Rectory, in the idea of conveying the intelligence, which had already been received, of the favourable situation of his friend; with whom he had promised to pass half the morning, which he would have been much better pleased to have wholly dedicated to his former favourite, Laura Delaunie; who had, in his opinion, he told Mr. Rothemere, more than answered the expectation he had originally formed both of her mind and person.

The invalid, on hearing this, attempted to turn towards him too suddenly for the delicate situation of the fractured limb, and was unpleasantly reminded of the restraint he had already anathematized with a thousand oaths. After a violent outcry, mingled with a shower of reproachful ejaculations upon his own want of recollection—

"Well, Harry," resumed he, "if you like the girl, why should you not marry her? I cannot see how you are to do better,

better, hampered as you are:——if you are inclined to take the northern tour, you know my friendship for you, so command my services."

Biranly thanked him for his proposed good offices, which he neither accepted nor declined: indeed he had resolved to be very circumspect in his communications to his companion, whose discretion and judgment were by no means high in his estimation; nor would he even have ventured this eulogium of Laura, had not his admiration overpowered his predetermined resolution.

CHAP. XI.

THE next morning brought to Mrs. Aubrey a letter from her husband, who had written immediately after having discovered the residence of St. Orme, for the information of which he had applied with

with success to a young man whom he knew to be his confidential friend; and from him Mr. Aubrey had the pleasure of learning that the regiment into which he had intended to exchange, had embarked for the West Indies before the business could be accomplished, the transport having, fortunately for St. Orme, received unexpected orders to sail with a convoy which was actually under weigh when the dispatches arrived at the port.

"Inform Caroline," continued Mr. Aubrey, "that I have seen her brother, and received from him a promise not to pursue any further his desperate design, without first apprizing me that such is his intention: but I entertain hopes of being able to set it quite aside."

This letter was dated on the evening of his departure from Adwan; and by the same post Miss St. Orme had the satisfaction of receiving a few lines from the runaway, written the next morning, after a second interview with his friend; entreating her to pardon the anxiety he had occasioned, which could only be excused,

excused, he said, from the disorder of his mind at the time of his leaving her so abruptly.

Caroline was now all hope and joy; nor was Laura less delighted to be relieved from a weight of inquietude and self-reproach she had more secretly, but not the less painfully endured; even Mrs. Aubrey had found her philanthropy towards the sufferer at the park very much weakened by the uneasiness she had sustained for the misfortune she believed him to have precipitated; and she now heard, as well as her young friends, of his apparent convalescence, with more satisfaction than they might have experienced, had not intelligence so favourable animated their charity and commiseration.

Biranly had been compelled to return to his quarters; but he soon renewed his consolatory visits to his unlucky friend, and seized with avidity every opportunity that offered of introducing himself at the Rectory, spite of the reserve with which Mrs. Aubrey thought it necessary to receive

receive his attentions, and repel the earnest inclination he betrayed, to be admitted occasionally to the society of her young inmates.

In what he believed however to be a fortunate hour, when he had one day gained access to the fair trio, Miss St. Orme suddenly interrupted a conversation in which they were engaged, by exclaiming—"Here is Cecil!—here is my brother!" and pointed to a chaise that turned into the road leading immediately to the house.

Laura, in equal trepidation, watched the approach of the carriage, which Mrs. Aubrey as well as herself soon discovered to be a travelling chaise of the Marquis, occupied by a man whom Laura recollected to be the steward of Bellingham House. Her heart palpitated with apprehension lest the mandate she supposed him to bear, might be of a distressing nature; and she heard, with increasing dread, that he entreated permission immediately to deliver to her a message from his Lord.

It

It was with some difficulty she complied with this request, by retiring to another room to receive his communication; and having learned that the Marquis and the children were in health, she anxiously awaited the commands of her father.

The steward then informed her that, having some business to transact at Adwan, his Lord had commissioned him to desire that she would set out without delay for London, in the chaise that he had travelled down in for the purpose of conveying her back; and that the Marquis had appointed William to attend her.

Not expecting so sudden a summons, Laura was thunderstruck; and the manner too in which this indication of his will had been dispatched to her, wounded her feelings—not even the condescension of a single line, but a verbal command from the mouth of a domestic!

The man who had dispatched the carriage on to the park, now withdrew, and followed it; and Laura, with an aspect

of

of grief and mortification, and the tears starting from her eyes, slowly returned to her friends.

Biranly, who was still with them, was alarmed at the expression her countenance exhibited as she entered the room, and starting from his seat, exclaimed—

"Good G—d! what is the matter?"

"You have not heard unpleasant intelligence, I hope?" asked Mrs. Aubrey, in an accent of concern.

"Yes, indeed," replied Laura: "I have heard that I must leave Adwan immediately—I am desired to remove to London!"

"Immediately!" repeated Miss St. Orme, in a dejected tone.

"Do you know if Lord John Traherne is still in town, my dear Miss Delaunie?" demanded Mrs. Aubrey.

"No, Madam, I did not recollect to enquire."

"When must you quit us?" said Caroline, taking her hand affectionately.

"I know not exactly," Laura replied; "for I received only a verbal

message, and it was hastily delivered to me, not to delay my journey."

Biranly, who had hitherto been traversing the apartment with a very thoughtful mien, now eagerly addressed her.

"Perhaps then," said he, "you might misconceive this cruel mandate;—it may not be necessary to desert us yet for a few days, or a week, or a still longer time."

"We will enquire more particularly," interrupted Mrs. Aubrey: "I hope we shall find it so."

This unwelcome remembrance of Lord Bellingham threw a gloom over the party they could not overcome; and it was not diminished when some time after the children ran into the room in the utmost consternation, exclaiming—

"Miss Delaunie is going away: Mrs. Maunder is come from the great house, and says Miss Delaunie is going away!"

Laura having risen to confer with her attendant, the little girl and her brothers hung about her, and begged she would

stay that day—only that one day! She promised she would comply with this entreaty, and then withdrew.

Dolly informed her young Lady that Mr. Dawson, the London steward, had told her she must begin packing up directly, for the Marquis expected Miss Delaunie at Bellingham House the next evening at farthest, as his Lordship was waiting to settle her before he went out of town.

"To settle me!" repeated Laura, with a look of alarm; "in what manner?"

"I don't rightly know, Ma'am," replied Dolly; "but Mr. Dawson says he supposes Lady Harriet had the ordering of it: and if she wasn't married, she would surely be the new Lady; but she have got a husband already, though she have no credit of one! Howsoever, they says she persuades my Lord, for her own ends, not to cast shame upon Lord Traherne and Lady Emily by getting a divorce, for fear he should go a courting again, and turn she off!"

Laura,

Laura, who had daily dreaded taking a newspaper into her hand, lest she should behold some intimation of the divorce spoken of by Mrs. Maunder, was pleased to learn even in this way that it would not take place.

"So, Ma'am," resumed Dolly, "I come to let you know what Mr. Dawson says, and to get your orders——I suppose we takes all with us!——Oh Lord! I forgot—and there's the Captain, Ma'am, making a piece of work, and saying it's d—m—d unhandsome and unconsidered of my Lord, to send for you and me away before he's well; and he says you are to write him word where you are to be, that he may come and see you, Ma'am."

Laura, without replying to this signified request of Mr. Rothemere, desired Dolly to enquire of him if he wished her to convey any letter or message to his sister; and likewise charged Mrs. Maunder to mention her regret that his confinement would prevent her from seeing him before she left Adwan.

"Lauk, Miss Laura," replied Dolly, "it's of no use my trying to get in more than a word at a pull, for he would only stop me twenty times; and I should never get to the end of my message till it was time to set off, I'll be bound for it! But as to the packing, Ma'am—I suppose I'm to get all ready, as Mr. Dawson says?"

"Certainly," replied Laura, with a sigh: "it is to-morrow morning then we set out?"

"Yes, Ma'am, as early as you please; and the sooner we gets to Bellingham House, the better my Lord will be pleased I'm told; "for he's in a mighty hurry to get away himself I hear."

Laura now returned to the party she had quitted, with the unpleasing confirmation Dolly had brought of her instant removal from friends who were so much endeared to her: an affliction which the careless negligence of the Marquis, in thus almost leaving the day and hour of her departure to the discretion of his domestics, did not alleviate.

On hearing how soon she was compelled to leave Adwan, Biranly quitted the room and the house, without uttering a syllable; and Miss St. Orme having then most affectionately expressed her regret at their separation, entreated that Laura would not be induced by the absence that already afflicted her, to withdraw the friendship she had hoped to confirm.—"I am sure," added she, "Cecil will be very much concerned; but perhaps you may see him in town."

This surmise gave Laura some confusion; from which Mrs. Aubrey relieved her, by saying that she would charge her with a letter to her good man, which she begged her to convey to him as soon after her arrival at Bellingham House as she should find it convenient; an injunction she readily comprehended the meaning of, and promised strictly to fulfil.

Dolly was to adjust every thing at the Park, and call for her young Lady in the chaise at nine o'clock; so that Laura took her breakfast with her friends the next morning, and their mutual silence

and saddened features spoke the regret they wished not however to increase by any avoidable indulgence of their feelings.

The children were anxious to learn why the ugly man came to take her away.

"He shall go to Adwan-dreen," said the little girl, "and Martha put his legs in the tocks!"

"He shall be flogged!" said one boy.

"He shall be hanged!" said the other.

Laura embraced them tenderly, and promised to send to each a pretty toy from London, as a remembrance; and she would entreat their good papa to bring it: but they were not to be consoled, and protested they would rather she came back with him herself.

At length the chaise approached; and Laura having already expressed to Mrs. Aubrey the sense she entertained of her benevolence, turned to Miss St. Orme, who exclaimed mournfully—

"If I must indeed part with you, dear Laura, at least write to me, that I may be assured I am not forgotten!"

Her

Her tears prevented the reply she wished to make, and those remembrances of good wishes she would have left for Mr. St. Orme. After several ineffectual efforts, she embraced her friends, and moved to the door, where she was met by Dolly, who told her that Captain Rothemere would insist upon her telling her young Lady that he sent his love, and desired her journey might be put off till he saw her, for he had something of very *petickler* consequence to say to her.

"My dear Laura," said Mrs. Aubrey, "I undertake to represent to Mr. Rothemere the impossibility of deferring your departure."

Laura thanked her, and requested that she would likewise make her adieus to Captain Biranly: then waving her hand to Caroline, and pressing that of Mrs. Aubrey, she hastened to the carriage, which immediately drove away.

"Well now really, for my part," exclaimed Mrs. Maunder, "I can't say, Ma'am, as I'm very sorry to get to London again; for there be always something

gay and genteel to look at—and there I shan't have people hunting for a secret day after day, and teazing one's heart out to learn just nothing. If you'll believe me, Ma'am, I've had no rest sin Mr. Rothemere came. — 'Oh, Mrs. Maunder,' says Susan to me, 'you are always so close! you didn't tell us of the Captain: he's a lover worth having—so free and good-natured!'—I could have told her—but only I remèmbered what you said, Miss Laura——else I could have told her of his blusterings and his passions as he goes into for nothing. Howsoever, says I—'He's no lover, not he!—he's almost old enough to be her father! and his wife, that's dead and gone, was as fond of my young Lady as if she had been her own; and I believe she was her godmother, or somewhat of that,' says I. So the old housekeeper, she comes in, in the God's speed.—'Ay, ay,' says she, winking to Mr. Tomlinson, 'we know all about that, and more than folks think for!'—Well, Ma'am, so then I held my tongue, you know—I said

said never a word more—nor I wouldn't if they was to creep about one ever so!—Well, then they at me again about Captain Biranly.—'There,' says I, 'you're nigher the mark.'——Lord, Miss Laura, talk of the devil, and you see his horns!—as I hope for mercy, here he is!"

Laura was now awakened from a deep reverie, by a voice which called to the driver to stop; and looking out of the window next to her, she beheld Biranly, who had overtaken the carriage on horseback.

"Miss Delaunie," said he, "I am going about twenty miles on the London road, and I will escort you so far on your route, if you will allow me that honour."

Laura was much chagrined at this intimation, which was given, she thought, with an air that seemed to preclude any repulse: yet she declined his attendance very positively, and hinted that as the escort appointed by the Marquis ought to appear to her sufficient, he might be displeased were she to allow of any other.

Biranly combatted her objections, however, with more obstinacy than argument; and, mortified that he should take advantage of her unprotected situation, she was compelled to give up the point in dispute. Upon this occasion, the indifference or neglect of her father, which thus subjected her to advances she could not properly repel, severely wounded her; and the reflections that succeeded, still added to the depression of her spirits.

On a pretext that the cold incommoded her, Laura drew up the glasses, and prevented any further conversation until the carriage stopped to change horses; but, spite of her reserve, Biranly then chatted to her until they again moved forward. She felt piqued at a perseverance that must be so evidently distressing to her; and again declining any intercourse with him, he at length disappeared, and Laura began to hope that he was offended at her ungrateful reception of his gallantry, and had left her to pursue her journey in peace.

But

But Mrs. Maunder very shortly undeceived her, by putting her head out of the window, to ascertain the fact; an offering she made to her own curiosity.

"Well to be sure!" exclaimed she; "if the Captain an't riding with Will, as if he was his fellow-servant! Who would go for to take him for a Lord's son? Well, I will say that for him, he's no more pride in him than if he was nobody's son!"

A few minutes after this observation had passed the lips of Dolly, the servant rode on to the next posthouse, to order the horses to be got out in readiness, and Biranly then again advanced to the side of the chaise; but when it drove up to the inn, William informed his young Lady that it would be some little time before she could be set forward, as the cattle she was to have, had not long come in; and he concluded with an enquiry if she would not be pleased to alight.

Laura very unwillingly assented, and Captain Biranly assisted her from the carriage, and conducted her into the house,

whilst William detained Mrs. Dolly to assist in altering the position of some part of the luggage. Laura was then still more impressed with a sense of the impropriety of her self-appointed escort; and without allowing him time to enter upon a subject that might have been more pleasing to him, she enquired very gravely if he had not exceeded the number of miles he had mentioned as the boundary of his ride.

"This stage must be that regretted boundary," he replied, "unless my lovely friend will encourage me to proceed."

"Oh, by no means," said Laura, eagerly; "on the contrary——"

"You advise me to return," interrupted he; "and perhaps I had better do so, before I subject myself to the too probable chance of the most cruel mortification I can ever experience."

He paused; and Laura awaited, in considerable apprehension, the explanation that was to follow, the nature of which she had a painful suspicion of; and believing

believing it had been encouraged and promoted by Rothemere, she bewailed the unlucky caprice that first dictated his compassionate visit to the deserted inmate of Adwan.

"I find I am a complete coward," resumed Biranly: "I am afraid to proceed;——dearest Laura, a smile at this moment would instantly restore me to courage, and inspire me with hope."

In the confused and perplexed aspect of Laura, however, no trace of the requested smile could yet be discerned; and she was moving to the door, when he detained her.

"Miss Delaunie, will you not allow me a few minutes?" demanded he.

"I wish to be in town as soon as possible," replied Laura, distressed and chagrined at her situation: "I am expected early in the evening, and I——"

"You are impeded by a casualty, not by me," observed Biranly: "the people of the house, or your servant, will no doubt inform you when you can proceed; and in this unavoidable interval, which

which my good or evil genius affords, I wish to enquire of the lovely Laura if I may claim a renewal of that portion of friendship and regard I once flattered myself with having possessed."

"Oh Heaven, I shall be pointed at by every one as a coquette!" Laura secretly ejaculated. "What shall I say to him—how shall I escape—what will Mrs. Aubrey—what will Caroline and her brother think of me?"

At this moment Dolly opened the door, and presented to her a letter, which she said she had received from Mr. St. Orme, who was going on to Adwan, and having accidentally seen her, he gave her that for her young Lady, but would not wait to speak to her himself.

Laura was in such extreme perturbation and horror at the unfortunate moment in which this encounter had taken place, that she had scarcely strength to receive the packet; but as Mrs. Maunder was withdrawing, after having executed her commission, she desired her to ask if they could now proceed.

"Bless

"Bless you, Miss Laura! yes," replied the *suivante;* "and the landlady have been calling to 'em these ten minutes, to put to; and it's only to humour William's vagaries that they don't:——I can't think, not I, what ails the blockhead! There he stands grinning, and saying I an't in the secret this bout, nor shan't be——"

"The fellow is not sober," interrupted Biranly hastily: "Miss Delaunie is earnest to pursue her journey, and wishes to be gone as soon as possible.——Will you tell him so, Mrs. Dolly?"

"Lord, I have told him so a matter of twenty times!" cried Mrs. Maunder, in a peevish accent: "so, Madam, if you'll be pleased to give him your own orders," added she, addressing Laura, "he must needs come to his senses; or else I'm sure his Lord should hear of his imperence!"

Laura, dying with impatience to open the packet St. Orme had sent, was very willing to follow the advice dictated by the displeasure of poor Dolly; but Biranly preventing

preventing her from leaving the room, said he would be her representative, and withdrew to execute the commission he had undertaken.

"What did Mr. St. Orme say to you?" demanded Laura eagerly, as her unwelcome companion shut the door.

"Why not much, Ma'am," replied the *suivante;* "he was in a hurry to go on to Adwan: so, while they got him another chay, he sees the carriage standing in the yard; so he looks about him, and spies me.—'Is your Lady here?' says he, all in a fantigue.—'Yes, Sir,' says I, 'my young Lady's going on to London: she have got a gentleman with her in that room, who came to see her so far on her way, for old acquaintance sake.'—'Mr. Rothemere, I suppose?' says young glum—we calls him so at Adwan, Ma'am.—'No, Sir,' says I, 'he's laying a-bed, to mend his broken bones——it's Captain Biranly, as my young Lady knew in Dorsetshire.' So, Ma'am, without saying thank'e to one for answering him civilly, he hollows out for

for the waiters to bring him pen and ink, and falls to writing: so, when he had done—'Here,' says he, 'carry this to Miss Delaunie: she will probable see Mr. Aubrey in London; but this letter, which he gave me for her, she ought for to have." And if you'll believe me, Ma'am, he went away without so much as saying—'Good-bye, hog!' Talk of his manners! I'm sure I've seen none of his manners, not I!"

Laura had listened to this narrative of Mrs. Maunder with an inquietude that superseded even her curiosity to see the contents of the billet that accompanied Mr. Aubrey's letter, or the letter itself.

"She have got a gentleman with her!" repeated she, internally: "what a phrase! How unhappily ignorant and stupid is this woman! How unfortunate that I should be quitting Adwan to-day! This Biranly too——"

The purport of his conversation during their *tête-à-tête* now suddenly recurring to her, she eagerly sought for a bell, which she rang with some impetuosity;

tuosity; and the landlady herself appearing to answer the summons, Laura desired that she might not be any longer delayed.

"No, Ma'am, to be sure," said the woman: "the ostler is now putting to—the horses have been waiting ever since the chaise came up; but he says he had orders not to bring them out till your Ladyship sent word, or else it would certainly have been more convenient to us to have set you forward directly, for the poor creatures must be back, and ready to set out again by five this afternoon."

"This is entirely a mistake," returned Laura, shocked at the implication that might have been put upon these imaginary orders: "on the contrary, I wish most earnestly to be in town, and was chagrined to hear, on my first arrival here, that I must be detained."

"I don't know, Ma'am," said the landlady, who now began to suspect how the *mistake* originated: "I hope it will not be any hindrance. I suppose that stupid

stupid fellow did not rightly understand what your Ladyship wanted—I'm sure he told me just exact the contrary; for we had a gentleman here just now, not five minutes back, as he served with the cattle you was to have had.—'Why,' says I, 'there's the young lady waiting as came in my Lord's chaise,' meaning that your Ladyship should be served first.—'Oh,' says he, 'the lady's in no such hurry: I have my orders; the lady don't want to set off these two hours yet!'—So, Ma'am, I hope your Ladyship will not think it was negligence; for I'm sure nobody on the road can be prouder of my Lord Marquis's custom, nor more anxious to give satisfaction than I be. The gentleman said himself he was in no such hurry, that five minutes could make a deference; and then Jack Ostler said again you wasn't in any hurry at all, if it was an hour or two: so I think he had his orders from somebody, for he wouldn't go for to say it of his own head—and I hope the mistake won't be material inconvenient to your Ladyship."

At

At this recital Laura was ready to sink with confusion and anguish, when she reflected that St. Orme must have formed of her the most injurious opinion:—the voice of Biranly, as it approached her, gave her however returning strength and activity; and earnest to escape any further discussion with him, she quitted the room without noticing the obsequious apologies of the good woman, and was flying towards the carriage, when she encountered him in the passage.

Evidently chagrined at her celerity, he endeavoured to detain her whilst he enquired if he might have the satisfaction of learning that she had safely reached town, by applying to Mrs. Hamilton.

"I know not if I shall remain in town a day," replied Laura, still advancing.

"Will you not then see Mrs. Hamilton?" resumed he.

"Certainly," she returned; "I should consider myself very unfortunate, were I not allowed to testify on every occasion the grateful attachment I experience

rience for her: but you must suppose, Captain Biranly, that I am not under my own guidance."

She had now reached the carriage, into which he assisted her; and Dolly having followed, she received the adieus of her parting escort, whose aspect betrayed how little pleased he was with the result of his expedition.

CHAP. XII.

THE moment after the chaise was driven off, she impatiently opened the packet from St. Orme, and unconsciously letting fall the letter of Mr. Aubrey, examined the lines in the envelope, which intimated, that as the writer understood Miss Delaunie to be particularly engaged, he would not press to be admitted to her presence, but would entrust to the care of

of her woman a letter he was commissioned to deliver to her from their Adwan friend; which he was happy to have so fortunate an opportunity of passing into her hands ere she quitted the country.

When Laura had for a considerable time contemplated these lines, she leaned her head against the side of the carriage, and, absorbed in a deep and painful reverie, reverted not to the letter alluded to, which by the motion of the chaise insinuated itself in a few minutes under the rug, unperceived by Dolly, who was sinking into a profound slumber, or by her thoughtful mistress, whose fixed eye and attitude denoted how intently her imagination was occupied.

At the next stage, the stopping of the carriage awakened them both; and Laura having again read the billet of St. Orme, recollected that she had been unaccountably inattentive to the more important communication of Mr. Aubrey; and having vainly sought for the missing letter, and enquired, with as little success, if her *suivante* had seen it, or could guess

guess what had become of it, she felt much alarmed, and quitting the carriage, caused it to be searched.

The packages of Mrs. Maunder, as well as the rug, were removed by William, but the letter was still invisible; and supposing it must have dropped from the carriage, she dispatched a man to examine the road for a mile or two back, in the feeble hope that it might not yet be picked up by any traveller: but the messenger returned with the intelligence he was most likely to bring, that he had looked very carefully, both going and coming, but could not find what he sought.

Laura, extremely shocked and chagrined at her inattention and unlucky absence of mind, was now compelled to proceed, agitated by an apprehension that Mr. Aubrey would be justly offended at her inconsiderate carelessness; yet she was unable to form any reasonable excuse for it, that could be in any degree allied to the truth, which she had not

not however any intention of departing from.

Within ten miles of the metropolis, the carriage was stopped by a servant of the Marquis, who delivered to her a letter from his Lord; and when he had put it into her hand, he instructed the driver to proceed to —— Street, and stop at a house he indicated.

Laura remarked this circumstance, and with trembling hands broke the seal of this new and unexpected mandate.

"My dear Laura," wrote the Marquis, "you would not find Bellingham House a pleasant residence at this moment, nor do I think it would be a proper one. I am compelled to leave town rather sooner than I had intended, and I must therefore inform you by this method, that I have with some difficulty procured you admittance in the establishment of Mrs. Meedon, where you will

will have an opportunity of associating with girls of rank and fashion, and imbibing such sentiments and manners as I wish you to be distinguished by. I fear it will be uncertain when I can again see you; but I am happy to have been enabled to give you this proof of my attention to your future welfare.

"Mrs. Meedon is prepared to receive you to-day:—you will therefore proceed immediately thither; and though you are doubtless already well pleased with your removal from Adwan, you will be still more so, when you have tasted all the *agrémens* of your new situation.

"You were right in informing me of the intrusion of that fellow Rothemere, as it is a connection that must be broken entirely;—in this you judged very well. Adieu!

"Your's,

"BELLINGHAM."

Laura was mortified and distressed at this sudden intimation of her residence in a family to whom she was wholly unknown; and the perfect indifference of the Marquis thus perpetually confirmed, was terrible to her. As she approached the metropolis her spirits sunk, and pale and dejected, she could scarcely answer the eager enquiries of Dolly as to her destination, who was tolerably satisfied however, since she was to remain in London.

When at length the chaise stopped before the door of a house wholly strange to her, Laura without a friend, or even a slight acquaintance to welcome her, cold, unhappy, and forlorn, numbed by her unaltered posture, and suffering, though unconsciously, from a want of refreshment, felt completely miserable.

"I don't know what the inside may be," exclaimed Dolly, examining all that was visible of the mansion; "but I am sure the outside an't no great matters!—and what a dull street too!——Lauk,

Miss Laura, I doubt I shan't like this much, now!"

The street-door was opened after an interval of some minutes, in which William had thundered at it more than once, and Laura, without even an introductory line, was compelled to enter the house, and present herself to the mistress of it; who did not however think it necessary to meet her unknown guest with any antediluvian civility, but heard her name announced with great coolness, and desired that she might be immediately conducted to her apartment, and informed of the general dinner hour: adding, however, a short apology for not receiving her personally, which was occasioned, she commanded the servant to say, by a particular engagement.

Laura was not entirely displeased with this very easy mode of conduct, as it left her at liberty to indulge her sadness, and conceal the tears that, spite of her efforts, stole into her eyes.

Her baggage was placed in the hall, where herself and her attendant waited,

until the servant of the house called to a lad in a livery like his own, who received instructions from his senior to order a female domestic to conduct the young lady up stairs.

William applied to her in this interim, to learn if she had any command to Bellingham House, or any other commission for him; and she instinctively sought for her purse: but the recollection of his evident connivance to detain her on the road, for which he had certainly taken a bribe from Biranly, suddenly restrained her liberality, and the fellow, in very perceptible disappointment, having received a negative to his enquiry, withdrew.

At length a young woman, rather dirty in her apparel, which had yet evident pretensions to fashion and elegance in the form of it, appeared with chamber lights, and Laura gladly followed her to an inconvenient apartment, consisting of a sleeping-room of confined dimensions, and a small antichamber, in which she was however pleased to observe a fire.

Her

Her conductress then condescendingly offered to escort Mrs. Maunder to the ladies' maids' sitting-room, or to the attic compartment destined to the honour of receiving her nocturnally; and as her civility was accepted, Laura then found herself alone, and leaning her head against the chimney cornice, suffered her tears to gush out unchecked.

The amiable and delicate kindness of Mrs. Aubrey rose to her view, in contrast to her present reception in a household where she was to be tolerated for the pension she paid, and where, as the Marquis had informed her, he had found it difficult to procure her admittance.

But these reflections were soon interrupted by a gentle tap at the door, which, after having hastily wiped her eyes, she opened; and a young person then entered the apartment, who made herself known as the daughter of Mrs. Meedon, by expressing much regret that her mother had been so particularly engaged at the moment of Miss Delaunie's arrival, as to have been compelled to appear so indif-

ferent to it.—" I was in the adjoining house," added she; " and the negligence of the servants have left me until this instant in ignorance of what would certainly have impelled my immediate attendance here."

Laura could not at this moment speak, but she bowed to this compliment of her visitor, who, perceiving that she had been weeping, appeared much distressed: her countenance was gentle and interesting, and Laura was consoled to observe the apparent sweetness of disposition of the daughter, however ill she might augur from the conduct of the mother; and at length took courage to mention her fatigue and consequent disinclination to attend the dinner party that day.

Miss Meedon readily undertook to offer her excuses; and after many little attentions, which spoke her desire of conciliating and soothing her new inmate, she withdrew.

Laura now felt less sad and forlorn: she dwelt with considerable satisfaction upon the hope that she might find Miss Meedon

Meedon a pleasing companion, and began to think it possible that she might likewise meet with other associates to supply in some degree those estimable ones she had left at Adwan.

In about an hour Dolly returned, accompanied by a servant laden with a part of the luggage; and Laura could not avoid observing that the aspect of Mrs. Maunder was not indicative of great good humour: but she repressed her discontent until her Lady and herself were *tête-à-tête*, and it then burst forth in a torrent of complaints, the various causes of which Laura was entirely unable to remedy.

"What a department is this for you to be in, Ma'am!" exclaimed she, in a crying tone; "and mine, Ma'am!—Lauk, if you could but see mine!—if you'll believe me, it's a nook of a garret, with four beds in it—and there an't room to swing a cat, much more for Christians, and six of us too to be stived up there! 'Why,' says I to the young woman, 'do you go for to think that I shall sleep

here?'—'Why,' says she, 'indeed you must; if you wants to keep your place, you must put up with it; for if you complain never so much, we havn't another place to put you into. There is one of my fellow-sarvents and me,' says she, 'we pigs under the kitchen staircase, in a place that's worse nor the black home in cat-gutter!'—And there, Miss Laura, below!—Oh you never was like to behold such distraction! There's thirteen young ladies here in this house, and there's their thirteen *foms*—waiting-maids they call 'em in my country—all of 'em fine ladies, and five of 'em has a footman a piece—and then there's six sarvents belonging to the house, all higgledy piggledy together, without room to stir hand or foot! And then the bells!—every minute tingle, tingle, tingle goes a dozen of bells in their ears—then the women falls to quarrelling, and the men to swearing, before they can agree whose bells goes, or whose doesn't! I'm sure, Miss Laura, I shall never know your bell, Ma'am, though they have been telling me which it is,

and

and ringing it in my ears, that I may know it again—I'm sure I must sit all day long gaping at it, or else you will pull till you are tired! Well, Ma'am, and this fine crew makes nothing of me—I, as have set down to table with their betters at my Lord's—but there they just set still when I went in amongst 'em, as if I had been nobody! So one saucy young minx says to another—'Well, Mrs. Binckey, have you been in the Park today?'—'Yes,' says t'other, sitting with a fine pliss upon her back, and tossing herself about in her chair like a lady;—'I went,' says she, 'to be sure; but it was too early, and the trumpery hadn't got home to their dinners: so I went on to the gardens,' says she, 'and by the time I came back, the company was more dessenter.'—So then she sets and stares at me, and falls to whispering and tittering—I'm sure half of 'em looks like misses of the town, instead of sarvents—neither better nor worse!"

These lamentations of poor Dolly were uttered whilst she alternately arranged that

part of the luggage she had obtained possession of, snuffed the candles, and stirred the fire; near which Laura sat with closed eyes, her hand supporting her aching head, which the monotonous, yet complaining tones of Mrs. Maunder did not by any means relieve; and contrary to the intention of the aggrieved *suivante*, she had not distinguished a syllable of her doleful tale, whilst Dolly piously thought she was lending the most profound attention; and under the influence of so pleasant a deception, continued to dilate her narrative of grievances, and interlarded it with all the gall her unworthy treatment created.

At length Laura recollected the letter of Mrs. Aubrey to her husband, which had been committed to her care; and whilst she wrote a few lines to the worthy man, expressive of her earnestness to see him, and giving some intimation of her present situation, she desired Dolly to enquire if a porter could be procured to take it to him: but Mrs. Maunder very shortly returned with intelligence that neither

neither the man-servant nor the lad had any time just now to receive her commands, but they would speak to the errand-man belonging to the house, as soon as they could set eyes upon him. Laura was therefore compelled to defer sending the letter and her own billet, until the Mercury in ordinary of the family should happen to make his appearance: *en attendant*, as she reflected that she might possibly be expected to introduce herself to her new associates in the course of the evening, she required the assistance of Dolly to arrange her dress, which had not long been accomplished, when Mrs. Meedon entered her apartment, and having greeted her with cool politeness, informed her that the ladies of her society might perhaps conceive themselves offended if Miss Delaunie continued her present seclusion, and advised her to return with her to the drawing-room, and she would present her to those of her fair inmates who happened to be at home.

Laura immediately declared her readiness to accompany her, and was conducted by the good lady through several passages, which from the steps in ascent and descent that intersected them, had evidently formed part of separated houses now thrown into one, for the accommodation of as many independent or motherless young women of fortune as it could in any manner contain.

As Mrs. Meedon was directing the attention of Laura to one of these inequalities, not many paces from the drawing-room-door, and scarcely distinguishable, from being covered with a dark carpeting, the servants, who were taking in the tea equipage, had left the door unclosed, and a voice within the apartment exclaimed—

"I wonder if poor old Meedon will succeed in ferretting her out! I declare I shall be quite *chagrinée* if she does not — I have an engagement—three indeed this evening, and I cannot go to either until I have seen her."

Laura

Laura felt much disconcerted at this *début*, which the lady of the house heard however with little apparent discomposure, and without hesitation instantly introduced her to the presence of the young woman, by whom she had herself been apostrophized in a manner so little respectful. In the drawing-room Laura beheld only seven of her future associates; the six absentees, having less curiosity perhaps than the nymph with the three engagements, had pursued their usual career, without casting away a thought upon a being who could neither *chaperon* them, procure them tickets for private masquerades and *fêtes*, or allot them an occasional corner in a carriage to a public breakfast ten miles out of town, or to a grand review.

The reception of Laura up stairs was very much in the style complained of by Dolly in the inferior part of the mansion: the young women present, two of whom were she found, by the title they were addressed by, the daughters of Earls at least, Laura might have thought, had she

she heard the descriptive eloquence of Mrs. Maunder, were either modelling themselves after their own attendants, or were otherwise very successfully and happily *doubled* by them.

A few minutes after her entrance, they proceeded to enquire of each other if such and such a young man had been seen that morning, particularizing each declared favourite, either simply by his family appellation, or prefixing a familiar diminutive of the first name; and when the chair of one of these dashing misses was announced, another of the party conjured her in a tender accent to inform *l'irrésistible* that she was dying with a *migraine*, and feared that it would detain her at home the next morning.

Still, however, the countenance of poor old Meedon remained placid and unruffled: her daughter, whom the party invariably distinguished by the name of Fanny, was stationed at the tea-table, from whence she very patiently distributed to each what their caprice required; yet they chose to amuse themselves with protesting

protesting that she was now thinking so much of her future hymeneal happiness with old Bradshaw, that she did not know what she was doing, and insisted upon sending coffee to Lady Augusta, who almost fainted at the sight of it, and green tea to Miss Daventree, who was suffering under a nervous affection.

This persecution, which was masked under a slender appearance of ease and good-humour, Miss Meedon endured with fortitude; though she sickened at the name of her supposed admirer, a decrepid and disgusting old miser, whom these obliging young ladies recommended to her acceptance, because she was destitute of the advantages of rank and fortune—advantages which they well knew gave charms where Nature had denied them, and heightened those she really had bestowed. They had indeed privately agreed that poor Fanny, though her features and complexion were very passable, had an air so *roturiere*, and a *tournure* so much of the common stamp, that it was impossible she could ever procure an establishment

blishment that was decent; so that when any very deformed or disagreeable man, possessing a competence, happened to be mentioned, the general exclamation was—"I wish he would marry poor Fanny Meedon!"

Laura was disgusted at the unfeeling apathy of the mother, who permitted an impertinence almost amounting to insult, without appearing sensible of it, or checking it by the slightest effort: on the contrary, it was precisely the young woman who exhibited the greatest share of contempt and perverseness, to whom she directed the largest portion of flattery rather grossly administered, and a certain deference of sentiment and opinion her own years and matronly character should have exacted.

Laura now comprehended that the idol to whom Mrs. Meedon bent, was interest; and very clearly discerned her own insignificance by the slender share of attention she obtained.

The number of unhappy damsels who were on this evening compelled to remain at

at home, was soon reduced to four; and after some wearying and languid conversation, in which they exhausted however several scandalous topics, they resorted to cards, to relieve their *ennui*, kindly including *poor old* Meedon in the party, to which they likewise invited Laura, who was unwilling to decline this first overture to an amicable intercourse, and submitted to be sufficiently instructed to commence a novitiate, in which she lost between three and four guineas, though, unlike her companions, she positively refused to bet.

Mrs. Meedon, who was far from dissuading the younger part of the set from hazarding stakes of comparative magnitude, was a much more considerable loser; whilst poor Fanny sat netting at a corner of the table, with an air of melancholy resignation, sighing at intervals either at the indiscretion of her mother, or some other cause unguessed by Laura, whose stealing glances sometimes met her's; but the looks of Miss Meedon were then instantly directed another

another way, as if she was fearful of incurring the attention she had so little reason to be pleased with, from the rest of the party.

CHAP. XIII.

ON the following morning, the moment Laura could escape from the breakfast table, which was not attended by more than four of the youthful society of Mrs. Meedon's mansion, she occupied herself in addressing by letter her Adwan friends. She had originally designed to delay this task, at once painful and pleasing, until she had received the visit she had flattered herself with obtaining from Mr. Aubrey; but the man who had taken the packet to his lodgings an hour back, had returned with intelligence that he

he had accompanied a gentleman some way out of town the day before, and it was uncertain when he would return: but as he had not given up the apartments he occupied, the people had taken in the letter.

Laura experienced a double inquietude on hearing this unpropitious circumstance: she had particularly wished to see Mr. Aubrey, in the idea of better explaining in person the accident she so severely regretted, and hoping that he would renew to her any instructions, or any intimation from Lord John, which she had thus lost. She was uncertain too, if Lord John were apprized of her removal, and thought she ought to make it formally known to him, at the same time that she feared such an annunciation might be thought by him impertinent and presuming, and perhaps betray to him a negligence, that from his severe Lordship she earnestly wished to conceal.

To Mrs. Aubrey, therefore, she wished to make an immediate confession of her unaccount-

unaccountable carelessness; but it required some consideration to explain how it was possible for the letter to disappear, since she herself could not distinctly or satisfactorily recollect how the circumstance had happened, and was completely perplexed to assign any reason for an absence of mind so perfect, as to cause her to disregard for a moment any communication from Mr. Aubrey.

At length, after many efforts to recall to her own mind how the accident did occur, or how it had probably occurred, she found herself compelled to state it, without any attempt at explanation; and entreated that Mrs. Aubrey would have the kindness to inform her if her husband meant to return to town shortly, or if she must be contented to receive the forgiveness she solicited from him, from Adwan.

The letter to Miss St. Orme required almost equal consideration, and was begun and laid aside a dozen times; for she wished through Caroline to insinuate to St. Orme that the attendance of Captain

Captain Biranly was equally unexpected and unwelcome to her; and by complaining of the artifice in which the servant of the Marquis was so evidently an accessary, convey to the ear of the brother an exculpation she most earnestly desired that he should listen to, and believe. But in thus endeavouring to vindicate herself, Laura now thought her narrative too laboured and circumstantial; then impatiently tore the succeeding effort of her pen, because it appeared to her that her disapprobation of the officious gallantry she had experienced, was so faintly expressed, that it might seem disputable.

In fine, she employed so many hours in the composition of these letters, neither of which by any means pleased her, after the infinite trouble she had taken, that ere they were entirely concluded, Dolly entered the apartment, to assist in changing her dress for dinner; she was then compelled to seal them without further alteration, and deliver them to the care of her *suivante*, who received a strict and

repeated

repeated charge to send them by the post of that afternoon.

Laura then prepared to meet again the dissipated set, whose sentiments and manners the Marquis with so much judgment and parental tenderness wished her to imbibe.

The party was now much increased; but she beheld not one countenance she could entirely approve, though more than one met her eye that for beauty might have been strictly scrutinized. From her they appeared to withdraw in haughty reserve, and only one of the circle thought proper to address any conversation to her; which was precisely the kind girl who had so far instructed her on the preceding evening, as to enable her companions to take a few guineas from her, without any flagrant breach of decorum.

In the evening the number again diminished, and those who remained, had recourse as usual to the card-table, to which Laura was a second time invited; but she firmly declined the honour they would

would have so generously conferred, and Fanny Meedon, observing that from this moment she was inhospitably neglected, silently retired; and returning in a few minutes, informed Laura in a whisper, that if she preferred withdrawing to the music-room, she would conduct her thither, as she had ordered the fire to be rekindled.

This invitation was gladly complied with, and, in a rational conversation with this young woman, Laura judged that she possessed much good sense, and still more sweetness of disposition.

Adverting to the occupation of those she had quitted, she could not fail to recollect that her mother headed the group of youthful gamblers, the conduct of Laura had tacitly censured; and she hinted to her that Mrs. Meedon was compelled to be of the party, both to preserve the peace between herself and her fair associates, and likewise to check, in some degree, the emulative zeal of the adventurers, who had sometimes lost in one

one evening the appointments of a music or singing master for several months.

Laura could not seem to doubt the propriety of Mrs. Meedon's conduct, thus duteously coloured by her daughter, from whom she was compelled to separate before the card-party broke up; because, though poor Fanny intimated that she wished to shew her every attention in her power, any observed or particular appearance of preference would subject her to increased ridicule and mortification.

Before they returned to the drawing-room, however, she mentioned to Laura that the carriage for the use of the ladies was generally at the door at one o'clock; and if it should be fully occupied the next day, she might probably get herself a place in it the day following, and be conducted to any of her friends who might reside within the round her senior companions happened to fix upon.

Laura thanked her for this considerate information, which she meant to take advantage of to see Mrs. Hamilton, the first

first opportunity that might be permitted her.

It was near two in the morning before the family in general retired to bed, and from that hour till about five or six Laura found her rest, as on the preceding night, broken every ten minutes by the return of some one of the absent party, who were entirely careless of the peace and repose of their fellow-inmates, and encouraged a very liberal use of the bell and the knocker, until their drowsy servants could prevail upon themselves to open the street-door.

Notwithstanding that the general breakfast hour was, in consequence of this nightly disturbance, extremely late, not more than a fourth of this motley family usually attended it. On the second morning after the domestication of Laura, the *déjeuné* party she met consisted of the nervous Miss Daventree, who, being a provincial girl, and not long arrived, had not yet fixed upon any better method of distinguishing herself than by proclaimed ill health—two sisters

of the name of Embleton, who, on the contrary, seized every opportunity fashion so pleasantly allowed them of evidencing to all mankind the hardiness of constitution neither midnight vigils nor the inclement atmosphere of an English winter roughly visiting their half-naked limbs could subdue—and lastly, Lady Mary Mornay, the motherless daughter of a very profligate Peer, who chusing to introduce into his own mansions very improper female companions for his daughter, from a remaining sense of decency removed her to a residence less exceptionable than either of his own.

Miss Meedon again prepared and distributed the tea and coffee; and at every interval the sisters and Lady Mary amused themselves with some of the daily prints that formed a necessary appendage to their breakfast equipage.

"My dear friend Matilda," said Miss Daventree, addressing the younger Embleton in a dolorous tone, "what is there in the column of anecdotes?"

"Oh

"Oh nothing in the least interesting," replied the dear friend, "for these stupid creatures, instead of writing about people one knows, are directing all their sarcasms and *jeux d'esprit* against each other! as if one cared a feather who gave the first or best political intelligence! I am sure all I regard is private intelligence; and if people would but agree to subscribe to pay any damages they might incur, they might make out a great deal more anecdote, without tormenting themselves with impertinent prosecutions."

"We have not had a *crim. con.* case for this month past," exclaimed Lady Mary: "how insufferably dull people are!"

"It is confidently stated," read Miss Embleton, in a hurried and exulting accent, "that the Marquis of B——— has avenged himself for a late celebrated elopement, by retiring to some far distant land with Lady H—— C——. This consolatory *contre-projet* appears to have been some time in agitation; but whither this

pair of doubly-fettered *inamorati* have directed their flight is not entirely known: the noble lover is merely attended by one confidential servant, and the lady by a veteran *femme-de-chambre* of tried fidelity. The time of their departure, which was rather precipitate, is ascertained to have been on the morning of last Thursday."

"And to day is Saturday," said Lady Mary. "I saw the Marquis of Borlington in the Park yesterday—it cannot be him! and besides, he is attached to Mrs. Denton!"

Laura now felt a deadly sickness steal over her, and hastily rising, left the room; but she was compelled to lean against the side of the passage for support, the moment she had shut the door; and before she could further retreat, a sound of merriment reached her ear from the party she had quitted, of which she could not entertain a doubt but that she was the subject. This conviction gave her a momentary strength, and she proceeded with trembling swiftness to her own

own apartment, where she terrified Dolly by the ghastly paleness of her aspect.

"Good God! Miss Laura, Ma'am, what's the matter?" exclaimed she.

"I am ill," returned her young Lady, whose distress increased on finding that it must be witnessed.

"God forgive me!" resumed Dolly, offering her a glass of water, "I'll be hanged if those fine quality Madams havn't been nagging at you already! You'll have no peace in this house, Ma'am, as the men below says—you are too handsome, you clips 'em all, and so I says!—but you'll not be liked the better for that—there's Miss Embleton—what's she? no beauty, I'll be sworn, whatever she thinks of the matter!——Lord, Miss Laura! don't take on so—you makes me cry too!—and those grand ladies, Lords' daughters! what of that, Ma'am, you're a Lord's daughter too, an't you?"

"I would to Heaven," ejaculated Laura, with clasped hands, "that I had been the child of a poor labourer!—the daughter of the meanest hoveller that

ever shrunk from cold and hunger, and I might have been contented and happy!"

"No, come, Miss Laura, it isn't so bad as that neither, Ma'am!—a Lord is a Lord howsever, let him be what he will else that an't quite so clever; so never mind, Ma'am! Lauk, I wouldn't vex and fret—I'd let 'em know——"

"Can you inform me," interrupted Laura earnestly——then checking herself, "yet no," she resumed, "it is not possible you should——"

"Of what, Ma'am? I'll lay my life I can tell you!" said the *suivante,* in a zealous tone.

"Do you know if Lord John Traherne is in town?" asked her young Lady.

"Why no, Miss Laura, I can't say that I know that there; but I dare say any thing else you can think of to ax me——"

Dolly was at this moment checked in her supposition by a tap at the door, and Miss Meedon entered with an anxious countenance.

'Pardon

"Pardon me," said she, advancing to Laura, "I was uncertain if your attendant was here; and I feared you were indisposed!"

Laura desired Mrs. Maunder to withdraw; and taking the hand of her friendly visitor—

"Ah, Miss Meedon!" she exclaimed, "you can guess, I have too much reason to apprehend, the source of the emotion that obliged me to retire so abruptly! Tell me—you are so considerate and so kind, that I can ask you—do you think that cruel sentence alluded to Lord Bellingham? and if it did, must I retain the dread I feel, lest it should be true?"

"There is little credit to be given to such vague reports," replied the good-humoured Fanny: "console yourself, dear Miss Delaunie; they are sometimes wholly without foundation, and often much misrepresented. Do you wish," she added, "to send to any friend?"

Laura declared her earnest inclination to see Mrs. Hamilton; and Miss Meedon advising her to take a chair, told her she

would immediately endeavour to secure a servant to attend her; which in a few minutes she returned to say she had succeeded in.

Laura, delighted to escape the misery of unfeeling companions, which she would have been very certain of meeting in the coach, equipped herself with alacrity, and in half an hour found herself in the house of Mrs. Hamilton, who was fortunately at home, and alone. By her she was received with kindness, and regarded with interest: but Mrs. Hamilton heard her relation of the event that so much distressed her, with silent gravity, and did not afford her so much encouragement to discredit the report as poor Fanny Meedon: she acknowledged that she had that morning read the paragraph alluded to, and feared the intelligence was not entirely untrue.

"If the fact should be thus," said Mrs. Hamilton, "if the Marquis, who is no longer a young man, should have been so unpardonably inconsiderate, why, my dear Laura, should you allow yourself to

to be thus affected? The bonds of nature are indissoluble, it is true; but the ties of esteem and affection should depend upon merit and virtue, and ought therefore to be controulable: when these are weakened by repeated shocks, the power of an unworthy object to inflict mortification and anguish is proportionably lessened. *I* have found it so, at least; and I can now hear with composure and resignation instances in my own family of obstinate folly and headstrong imprudence; because I am but too certain that, were my latest breath to be spent in representation and entreaty, it would avail as little, and be considered with the same attention as the buzzing of a summer fly.

"You have beheld lately, my dear Laura, perilous examples—to you they have not fortunately appeared alluring, but disgustful. You have too witnessed an amiable example of a contrary nature: in making an election of your model, I am convinced your good sense and judgment will lead you to discriminate rightly,

and then you will have the power of supplying that deficiency of friends which vicious dissipation may have deprived you of, by others which the attraction of your own merit will create to you "

The entrance of Mr. Hamilton now interrupted the lecture of his Lady: he advanced to Laura with an unusual complacency of aspect; for he seldom indeed exhibited any, but cased his sentiments and feelings in a grave reserve, originating perhaps in nature, and strengthened by habit; but his heart was kind and humane.

Having learned her new residence, he would not quit the room without seconding very earnestly the request of Mrs. Hamilton, that she would remain throughout the day with them; a request Laura very gratefully acceded to, and having dismissed the servant of Mrs. Meedon, she prepared to enjoy a few peaceful hours.

As they sat after dinner, Mr. Hamilton enquired by what particular accident his mad brother-in-law had contrived to procure

procure his broken limb; and when Laura, softening the account of his frantic folly, slightly mentioned the circumstance required of her, he shook his head expressively, and dropped the subject.

A little before eleven in the evening the carriage, or the *Meedon caravan*, as it was generally termed in the fashionable drive, where it paraded very frequently—the Meedon caravan called for Laura; an attention she readily imagined to proceed from Fanny. Could she, however, have divined the consequence of accepting a seat in it, she might probably at this juncture have declined an honour, the immediate price of which was a very tedious attendance at the door of the Honourable Mrs. Bergarde, at whose assembly was Lady Mary Mornay, her fair cousin, who entered the carriage with a very slight apology for having suffered Laura to wait so long.

The coachman now galloped off to the Opera House, where he was to pick up the gentle Embletons; but the obstacles to his near approach were so numerous,

that he could not, with every varied effort of lashing and swearing, overcome them.

Laura was very much alarmed on finding herself in the midst of a concourse of carriages, driving furiously forward, crossing amidst the execrations of surrounding whips, or backing against each other, spite of the most violent remonstrances. She beheld the pole of a chariot almost in contact with the window near which she sat, and with considerable presence of mind let down the glass at the moment it was dashing against it, whilst the foam of the horses, goaded, checked, and irritated, flew over her cheek.

Lady Mary screamed violently, and seizing the arm of Laura, exclaimed—

"We shall be killed! we shall be killed!" and when the danger appeared a little to subside, she soothed her terrors, by raving at the impertinence of the servants, in not taking her home before they proceeded to the Haymarket; forgetting, or chusing to forget, that she was

was herself the occasion of the offence, by detaining them until it was too late to have done so, without entirely neglecting her friends, the Embletons.

In a few minutes the tumult redoubled: an ungovernable pair of horses spread confusion and terror around them; their driver was thrown from his seat, and the carriage to which they belonged, was entirely demolished.

"Will no one take me from this dreadful place?" cried Lady Mary: "I shall be killed—I shall be killed!"

"Take courage," said Laura, who feared she would faint; "I hope we shall soon be disengaged."

As she spoke, a pole was driven through one of the side panels with a dreadful crash, and Lady Mary the next moment, in a tone half joyful and half supplicating, ejaculated—"My father! Oh my father!"

The person she thus addressed was in the carriage from which the injury had been received, and was indeed her father, the Earl of Glendarvon, who called to

his servants to succour if possible his unprotected daughter, now fainting in the arms of her trembling companion.

But it was some time ere this command could be obeyed; though at length Laura and herself were taken from the shattered caravan of poor old Meedon, and conveyed to a shop that was still open, where Lord Glendarvon procured assistance for Lady Mary, and offered restoratives to her young associate, whom he had already discovered to be a very lovely girl.

Laura declared, however, that she did not require any, and assiduously employed herself in aiding the recovery of the greater sufferer, who in a few minutes revived, and soon regained her recollection.

"Mary," said her father, "you are extremely indebted to your charming friend for the tender attentions she has honoured you with; and I wish you to add your acknowledgments to those I am anxious to offer to this fair ministering angel."

"How

"How was I saved, papa?" demanded Lady Mary. "I thought I must have been killed!"

"This young lady supported you," replied her father, "and very much assisted in extricating you, senseless as you were, from your perilous situation."

"Dear Miss Delaunie," cried she, "I am sure I am very much obliged to you: I told the Embletons this morning that I was certain you were very good-natured!"

Laura, on hearing the name of the sisters, recollected that their situation might at that moment perhaps be very embarrassing, and enquired of Lady Mary what could be done to assist them.

"Indeed I do not know," replied their dear friend and approved intimate; "John must procure them chairs, I suppose. I am sure they cannot be in a more shocking situation than they chose to place me in; and I really think it was very impertinent to expect me to wait for them at the Opera-house door!"

Lord Glendarvon did not express any indignation at the circumstance, but calmly

calmly sent one of his own servants with that of Mrs. Meedon, to attend the offenders, whilst he accompanied Lady Mary and her companion to their dwelling. In the carriage he again uttered a warm eulogium upon the efforts of Laura to assist his daughter; and thus strongly reminded, Lady Mary, who had often occasion to recur to the liberality of her father, took the hand of Laura, and protested that from that moment she should be her dearest friend, and she would love her better than any body in the world, papa excepted: and though Laura declared she had no claim to this threatened attachment, yet, as it appeared to please Lord Glendarvon, Lady Mary persisted in her intention.

He was prevented by an indispensable engagement from accompanying the new friends to the drawing-room of Mrs. Meedon; and, lamenting that he was compelled to pass the next day a few miles out of town, he told his daughter that he should immediately on his return inform himself how far her fair companion

panion and herself were recovered from the terror of their adventure.

Laura, who had found the excessive acknowledgments both of the father and daughter much more distressing than gratifying, suffered Lady Mary to have the pleasure of relating her distresses without any assistance; and pleading a violent head-ache, which was indeed true, she immediately retired to her apartment, and to her repose.

CHAP. XIV.

BY the time Dolly attended her young Lady the next morning, she had learned by report, which in the household of Mrs. Meedon had a very rapid circulation, of the disaster of the preceding evening, and very earnestly congratulated her that she had not been killed.

"Why,

"Why, Ma'am, we was both in bad luck yesterday," added Mrs. Maunder; "for I only went out after you was gone, to buy some threads and tapes, and other odd matters, and while I was away, who should come and see me but William; but he never sot down, nor waited, nor nothing, to see if I was coming back, which they told him I was, and only axed the question, and when John said I was not at home, off he sot; but he said he believed he should call again this morning; so, Ma'am, if you've any thing you wants to know, why tell me, you see, and I'll pump it out of him."

Laura not entirely approving of this mode of gaining intelligence, merely desired her to enquire if Lord John Traherne were in town, and if Lady Emily and her brother were at Bellingham House, and in health; which was very readily promised, and Dolly promised herself at the same time that she would advance a few more enquiries for her own private satisfaction.

About

About one o'clock Laura returned to her apartment, expecting and dreading the communication of her attendant, if, as she supposed, she had seen William; and a few minutes after, Dolly followed her with a face of consternation and a confusion of manner her young Lady was not slow in remarking. In contradiction to her usual custom, she did not appear in haste to impart what she had learned, until Laura, in a trembling voice, asked her if William had not called.

"Called, Miss Laura! yes, Ma'am, he called to be sure!" replied Dolly, taking up two or three things successively, and laying them as quickly down again.

"What did he say to you?" demanded Laura, unable to check the emotion that prompted the question.

"Why, Ma'am, I don't know, not I," returned she: "I'm sure I'm so flustered, I don't know what I'm about!"

"I conjure you to tell me!" exclaimed Laura:

Laura: "perhaps I guess the worst—pray inform me!"

"Why, Ma'am, he says——but, lauk, he can't tell, you know, for sartain—it's only what he hears folks say."

"What is it?" asked Laura, with a colourless aspect.

"Why they say, Ma'am, that Lady Harriet Clinton, like a good-for-nothing devil as she is—God fergive me! has ticed away my Lord Marquis to foreign parts; and he's wrote to old Lord John, that he'll never come again—and, what's more, he intends to stick to his word, for he's sold all he can, they say, and tookt up money upon his lands, or off his lands, or somewhat."

"Never return!" exclaimed Laura.

"I hope it an't true, Miss Laura—I hope so——but come what will, I'll never leave you, Ma'am, whiles you shall say—'Dolly, stay with me!'—I've tended you, Miss Laura, when you was a young thing, not higher than that—and I'll tend you yet, come what will!"

"Not

"Not return!" repeated she.—"Dolly, I thank you for this proof of your attachment to me——good Heaven! never return! Where does Lord John reside in town?"

"William says, Ma'am, in Cumberland Street—here, Ma'am, I got Mr. George, Lady Augusta's man, to write it down."

Laura now thought that Mr. Aubrey had intimated something of this impending storm in the missing letter; and perhaps conveyed to her instructions and advice from Lord John. Painfully agitated by this idea, she begged of Dolly to go herself to the lodgings of Mr. Aubrey, and enquire if he had been there, or was still expected to return.—"If he is not there," added she, "and the letter which I was commissioned to deliver to him from Mrs. Aubrey should still remain at the place, I must entreat you to proceed to Cumberland Street—perhaps he may be at the house of Lord John, or the servants there may accidentally know where I can address him."

She

She then gave Dolly money to take a hack, both for convenience and expedition, and hastened her away.

Until her return, as she was too much discomposed to rejoin the fair society, she sat alone: but her solitude was shortly interrupted by a kind visit from Miss Meedon, who having mentioned her regret that her officiousness should have subjected her to such an unpleasant adventure as she had encountered the preceding evening, and having informed herself if she could perform any little office of attention, was then compelled to leave her; and very soon after her departure, the new friend of Laura, Lady Mary Mornay, sent to beg admittance for five minutes; a request she could not refuse, but which she very reluctantly granted.

Lady Mary met her with the most condescending expressions of attachment and gratitude, to which Laura replied with as much composure of mind and as much complacency as she could assume: and her gentle associate having nothing better

to

to do until she was called to accompany three or four of the party to the Park, continued to torment her with demonstrations of friendship which she could not return, and professions equally insincere, until Mrs. Maunder made her appearance.

The impatience of Laura could not then be longer controuled; and taking Dolly into the next room, she demanded if she had heard of Mr. Aubrey.

"Lauk, yes, Ma'am!" replied the *suivante*: "I see the housekeeper at Lord John's—for they had not seen him at t'other place—and when I told her who I came from, she said Mr. Aubrey had sot off with her Lord, to go after the Marquis, this blessed morning She said her Lord and Mr. Aubrey went the day afore yesterday to see Lady Betty, her Lord's sister—so whiles they was there, an old sarvant who had lived with the Marquis's father, he went after 'em, and told Mr. Aubrey somewhat that he had picked up, she said, and so her Lord and him went, late as it was, farther on, to the Marquis's

Marquis's willer: but his Lordship wasn't there; so they comed back at two o'clock yesterday morning; and then her Lord, poor old gentleman! wanted to set off directly after the Marquis, for the credit of the family, to persuade him to come back; but Mr. Aubrey made him stay, to try to find out where my Lord was gone to, before they sot off harum scarum; and meanwhiles there comes a letter from the Marquis; so they went at five this morning. She says, Ma'am, her poor old Lord an't slept a wink, she knows, sin he heard that twinkling of the matter from old Matthew, and an't eat a bit scarce—and she thinks what with that, and scurrying about in such a fashion, which, poor old gentleman! he an't a bit used to, that it will be the death on him!"

After receiving intelligence so painful, Laura was compelled to return to her young guest; but as she found it impossible to rally her spirits in any degree, Lady Mary hinting that she was not unacquainted with the cause of her inquietude, endeavoured to persuade her that it ought

ought to be a subject of perfect indifference to her: her argument was not, however, quite similar to that of Mrs. Hamilton, for she merely asserted that the conduct of the Marquis was a very casual thing, and nobody could think any thing of it: "and as for Lady Bellingham," added the consoler, "she will of course marry Mr. Averne, after the divorce, and be visited again, when she gives breakfasts and *fêtes*——dear me, I am sure it would not chagrin me at all—it happens so often!"

Laura felt much relieved at her departure, notwithstanding this kind attempt to assuage her griefs; and now finding herself really indisposed, and her fortitude at the lowest ebb, she obtained permission of Mrs. Meedon to seclude herself for the rest of the day, which she passed in the most mournful reflections, haunted by the images of Lord Bellingham's deserted children, now, by the absence of their father and uncle, entirely dependant upon the attention of wretches without principle or one humane affection, as their conduct at Adwan had proved to her.

Earnestly wishing to see and embrace them, she dispatched Dolly the next morning to learn at Bellingham House if they were yet there, or at the villa of the Marquis near town; and Mrs. Maunder returned with information that the children had been sent to a place of Lord Bellingham on the Sussex coast, where he had desired they might remain until he wrote his further intentions respecting them.

"At Bellingham House, Ma'am," added Dolly, "there is nothing but confusion and rabble-rout, and noise and bawling—for people was taking down all the grand furniture and things, and carrying 'em away; and they says my Lord has sold it all;—and the court was full of waggons, and carts, and porters, and polsterers—and, Ma'am——"

Laura was shocked; and not wishing to hear any more of a detail that produced so many afflicting images, gently checked the volubility of her well-meaning attendant.

The ardently expected replies of her Adwan friends she yet more impatiently awaited,

awaited, when her tortured mind reverted to her prospects, and that she recollected that they were now the only beings in the island, Mrs. Hamilton excepted, who interested themselves in any degree in her welfare. The mortifications of her present situation were severely felt by her: surrounded as she was by a society haughty, capricious, vain, and unreflecting, she could expect in it only inconvenience, misery, and irksome disgust.

In the height of her melancholy ruminations, Lady Mary entered, with the air of a most tender and intimate friend, and gently chiding her for indulging sensations her affection condemned, insisted that her dear Laura (whose first name she had learned for the purpose of addressing her in an endearing manner), that *her dear Laura* should accompany her to the music-room, to dissipate by her charming presence the *ennui* of a visit from her singing-master.

Laura was unwilling to repay the advances of this young lady with a coldness that would be termed ingratitude, and

might perhaps contribute, by the indignation it would excite, to render her present abode insupportable to her. She likewise felt that her spirits sunk in proportion as she indulged her sadness; and experiencing too the necessity of discouraging this depression, she complied with the invitation.

In the music-room she beheld the father of Lady Mary conversing with a stranger, who wore an air of very visible consequence and conceit, took snuff with a foreign mien, and surveyed Laura with an impertinence that, added to her surprise at the unexpected appearance of Lord Glendarvon, which Lady Mary had not thought proper to announce, brought a deeper blush into her cheek.

Again this very grateful Nobleman adverted to the animated sense he entertained of those well-timed attentions his daughter had been the object of, when he had encountered her on Saturday evening: he was charmed to observe, he said, that the terror of the *fracas* in which she had been engaged, had not made

made any impression on the health of the amiable Miss Delaunie; and was proceeding in the same complimentary style, when the stranger regarding his watch, started in affected surprise, exclaiming—

"Ah, Miledi, non posso rester piu long tems—sono stato qui, près qu'une heure! Allons, Miledi, une petite canzonetta."

"Oh, I cannot sing this morning," returned Lady Mary; "I have not a note in my voice!"

"Ah, Miledi," resumed Signore Cantatore, with a *fade* smile; "no escuse—you ave fine voce—bote dis Signora belissima will sing forse, for you?"

This proposition was extremely approved by Lord Glendarvon, but Laura declined it, not without some secret indignation at the freedom of manner with which it was made; and at length Lady Mary was persuaded to execute a duet with her instructor, in which he contrived to throw so much *sentiment*, ogled, grinned, languished, and acted the theatrical lover with so impertinent a licence, that Laura expected to behold every succeeding

ceeding minute some very violent effect of Lord Glendarvon's disapprobation: but, *au contraire*, he witnessed the sentimental contortions of the Signore Cantatore with great composure, whenever he could prevail upon himself to turn his regards from the figure of Laura; and when the performance was concluded, complimented his daughter upon her improved style, and extended the commendation to the master, whose taste, assiduity, and judgment, his Lordship affirmed, could not fail to ensure the most happy effect.

"Miledi sing très bien," replied the Signore, "for Englis lady:—le Signore Inglese," added he, taking snuff with a simper, which was embellished by his half-closed eyelids, "le Signore Inglese sing like deir own vinter, all fross and snow—per essempio—when dey sing canzonette d'amore, ou des chansons solâtres, mi pare qu'elles s'endorment! But Miledi, wid my lesson, will sing avec beaucoup *de sentiment!*—Now, Miledi, encore dis littel

littel duo sing wid me—"*Adorato mio ben*——"

Thus encouraged, Lady Mary exerted her powers of sentiment, and really merited so perfectly, in this second effort, the eulogium of the Signore Cantatore, that Laura was confounded, the instructor was in raptures, and Lord Glendarvon applauded both with hands and voice.

But il Signore Cantatore now again regarded his watch, and declaring in a mixed phraseology of Italian, English, and French, that the young Countess of —— was then impatiently waiting to receive her lesson, he withdrew.

Lord Glendarvon did not appear by any means so well disposed to quit the place: he remained a considerable time after the patience of Laura was entirely exhausted, conversing on topics wholly uninteresting to her; and having taken occasion to expatiate very largely on the beauties of a little place he had lately purchased in the vicinity of the metropolis, he told his daughter he was preparing it to receive a

visit from her, when the spring was rather more advanced.

"Mrs. Bergarde will assist you in doing the honours of the place," added his Lordship, "and I hope you will be able to induce your charming friend to accompany you."

"Oh, I will not be denied!" exclaimed Lady Mary: "it shall be my first request to my dear Laura, and she will not, I know, have the cruelty to mortify me by a refusal."

Laura endeavoured to evade any further discussion of this proposal, by saying she would refer it to her friends.

"Oh, I will entreat them so earnestly, that they shall not deny me," returned the importunate Lady Mary, who had received a hundred pounds of her father about an hour before, with a promise of an increase in her appointments.—"Who must I apply to, my beloved Laura? I will not lose a day!"

Distressed by this unexpected demand, Laura sighed, and turned away; and her new friend perceiving that her inconsiderate

siderate zeal had given her pain, very adroitly spared her the mortification of attempting a reply, by hurrying to another subject.

In a short time after, Lord Glendarvon, whose visit had been uncommonly long, left the house, and Laura was then permitted to return to her apartment, where the recent enquiry of Lady Mary gave birth to very uneasy reflections, and she earnestly longed to question Mrs. Hamilton upon a subject so important to her. She had some confused idea of having heard Mr. Rothemere mention guardians appointed in her infancy, but she knew not that she possessed any property independent of the bounty of the Marquis, and she thought, in the present gloomy situation of affairs, it would not be wonderful if she should discover that no arrangement had been made for her support: but she was compelled to retain this new inquietude until the following day, for it was now too late to seek Mrs. Hamilton.

The

The next morning then she had again recourse to the favour of Fanny Meedon to obtain an attendant; and stealing out unobserved by Lady Mary, who might perhaps have desired to accompany her, she reached the house of her friend, and, to her extreme disappointment, was told that she was not at home. Laura felt, however, so much interested in the enquiry she wished to urge, that she ventured to ask for Mr. Hamilton, and being conducted up stairs, he attended her.

In some confusion, she then apologized for this step, but he interrupted her with an affirmation that he received her embassy with pleasure, and was flattered that she had sent to him: yet, when she adverted to the question she meant to have put to his Lady, his aspect changed, and though he acknowledged having some information of the guardianship she spoke of, he said she must require the particulars of Mrs. Hamilton.

With this vague confirmation of her surmise, Laura was compelled for the present

present to be satisfied; and Mr. Hamilton having parted from her at the door of his mansion, retired to the apartment she had quitted, to reflect with indignation and regret, upon the injuries she had received from the Melville family; for though he had affected in her presence to be ignorant of her concerns, the interest his wife took in the child of Mrs. Rothemere had lately prompted him to enquire into the responsibility of the people appointed by the Dowager Countess of Melville, to guard the property of Laura, settled upon her by the Marquis, before repeated prodigalities had dried up the sources of his liberality. Mr. Hamilton then learned that one of these men had been a tradesman of the elder Lady Melville, and that the other was an attorney of notorious character, who at the time of the transaction had been a sort of *factotum* to her--steward, broker, money-borrower, lawyer, and adjuster of every *intricate* business in which the Countess was then engaged.

The

The first of these guardians had died without heirs, and intestate; and the second having nefariously withdrawn the money of his ward from the public-fund in which it had been placed, was then in the King's Bench for other speculations of the same nature.

END OF VOL. II.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.

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